

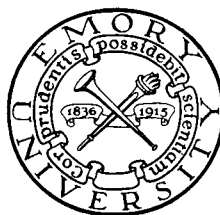


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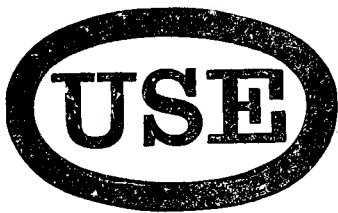
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# MEMOIRS OF A LANDLADY

BY

GEORGE R. SIMS

AUTHOR OF

'MARY JANE'S MEMOIRS,' 'MY TWO WIVES,' 'DAGONET DITTIES,' ETC.



London

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1894



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# MEMOIRS OF A LANDLADY

## I.

### *THE LANDLADY'S OWN STORY.*

‘MRS. JARVIS, ma’am,’ he used to say to me often, as I stood in the doorway after seeing him about what he’d like for his dinner, or asking him when it would be convenient for him to settle for the weeks that were owing—‘Mrs. Jarvis, ma’am, if you were only to write your experiences as the proprietress of furnished apartments, there isn’t a publisher in the land that wouldn’t jump at ’em, and if you’ll take my advice you’ll do it, ma’am, you’ll do it.’

He was as nice a gentleman, was Captain Roberts, as I ever had in my house, though dreadful bad pay, through his property being in



the West Indies and South America, where, as he used to say, poor fellow, the elements of Nature continually conspired against him and prevented a remittance from his agents. I never did know any human being that suffered from earthquakes, and cyclones, and hurricanes, and floods to such a dreadful extent. In an ordinary way your parlours or your drawing-rooms, when they don't want to pay punctually, are only 'a little short this week,' or have been disappointed in a cheque, or have forgotten to go to the bank, or haven't received the dividend yet, or something ordinary; but with Captain Roberts it was always something absolutely appalling that prevented him giving me the money that was due to me. Why, the very first week that he came to me and I sent him up his bill, he rang the bell and told me that a hurricane in the West Indies had blown down six square miles of sugar-canes belonging to him, and made him temporarily so hard up that he would be glad if I could let him have a sovereign till his remittance came from South America, where he had a large cattle farm;

and before that remittance was due a river in the immediate neighbourhood overflowed and swept I don't know how many thousands of his sheep away in a single night. At another time, poor fellow, when a new suit had come home from the tailor's for him to go to the funeral of a relative who he was sure had left him some thousands of pounds, and the tailor's man wouldn't leave it without the money, he came to me with tears in his beautiful blue eyes, and implored me to pay the amount, as he was temporarily without funds owing to an earthquake in Lima which had swallowed up an entire street, the whole of which was his freehold property, and on the very day before the rents were due, and only one of his tenants left to tell the tale, and his agent didn't like to worry him (the tenant) just then for any money, as the catastrophe had rendered him temporarily insane.

A fine figure of a man with a handsome, sunburnt face was the captain, and had seen the world, and had passed his life in viewing his properties in foreign lands, but dreadfully unfortunate from the

moment he came to me, only bringing one box of clothes with him, the ship he came over in having been wrecked off the coast of Spain, and him escaping with that one box which happened to be in his cabin, and brought ashore in a small boat.

He left me years ago £78 10s. 6d. in debt, being telegraphed for to come over to Australia at once—he showed me the telegram—to receive some thousands of pounds compensation from the Government for land of his which was required for a railway, and having to give evidence before the arbitrators, I think he called them, and I have never heard of him since; so I suppose some dreadful catastrophe happened just as he was going to receive the money, and I don't ever expect to be paid now, but a more agreeable or entertaining lodger I never had, and he was never tired of hearing me tell the many strange things that happened to me with my lodgers, and it was what he said then about my writing them down and letting them be published that causes me now,

years afterwards, to take up my pen and see if I can do it.

I am an old woman now, and what the world would call well-to-do, for I have always been well let of late years, and I have money in the bank and in securities, and could afford, I dare say, if I wished, to give up letting apartments and go and live quietly in the country; but alas! I am a lone woman, too, and have had many troubles. My poor dear Jarvis, with all his odd ways and troublesome habits, has been in his grave these twelve months past, and I have neither chick nor child, only Topsy, my dear little pug dog, who is old and feeble, and almost blind, and Tommy, my big black cat, who came to me twelve years ago a stray kitten; and as I sit alone and think over the past I miss Jarvis more than ever, in spite of the worry he was to me; but I miss more than all the merry laugh of Annie, my dear dead sister's child, my own adopted daughter. Only a while ago she was here, filling the house with her sunshine and laughter, and to-day—sometimes I think I should

have been happier if I could have known she was lying in the quiet churchyard with her mother who loved her so well, with her mother who left her a sacred charge to me. But I mustn't think of it—I mustn't think of it—only to hope that some day it may all come right, and I may be able to take her to my old heart again, and kiss her tears away and forgive her all.

When I come to her story I shall write it, but not now—not now.

Everything seems to have grown older about the place since Annie went: the old dog, and Tommy, and I. Nothing seems the same; even the bells when they ring don't ring as they used to, and the people overhead seem to walk about as though they were in a house where someone was lying dead, and the drawing-rooms don't laugh as they go upstairs. I know they are all sorry for me, and sorry about Annie, for everybody loved her. I dare say it's all my fancy, but it seems to me as though over my front-door were written in great black letters, 'The House of Sorrow,' and as if the



people passing in the street looked up at my windows and knew the story, and missed the fair young face that used to look out over the blind, and make sunshine with her smile.

It is because I brood so much over the great sorrow, because I feel so lonely now, that I am going to distract my thoughts and write the many things that come back to me as I think of the past. And so I commence my memoirs.

My mother, who was a widow ever since I can recollect, had a house in a street running off Russell Square, and let it out in apartments, and I and my sister, as soon as we had finished our schooling, assisted her in the management, and took our share of the housework. My sister married a young man, the son of a livery stable-keeper in the neighbourhood, but it was never a happy marriage, for her husband took to drink and gambling, and having the management it came to grief, and was sold up, and he had to take a job fly driving; and one foggy night driving a job home from an evening party he ran into a

lamp-post, being, I am afraid, none too sober at the time, and was pitched off the box on to his head and taken to the hospital and died there, leaving my poor sister with a baby boy only three months old, a burthen on my mother, who was herself doing none too well and in debt through being unlet all one season, owing to having had a case of scarlet fever in the house, and her neighbours who were in the same way of business taking care that it was well talked about, though the doctor had assured my mother that all danger of infection was over.

It was a great blow to us when we were so worried at home—this trouble coming upon my sister Annie; and I remember when she came back to live with us all in black and widow's weeds with the poor little baby how we all sat round the supper table the night she came and cried, three lone women together, and felt as if there was nothing in front of us but the work-house.

But, as it turned out, things were not going to be

so bad as we thought, for Annie's husband's brother, who had gone out to Australia many years before, came back a rich man, and, hearing of his brother's death, came to see us, and was very sorry for her and the baby, and he did a very noble thing. He said he had plenty of money, and nobody but his old father to look after, and if mother liked he would find the money to furnish a better house in a good neighbourhood for her, and she could pay him five per cent. for the use of the money, and return it when she liked, and Annie and her boy were to live with her.

So, as soon as the house had been taken and furnished, we moved into it, and soon began to do fairly well; not exactly to make much money, but we lived and got out of debt, and we had much better people in our apartments than we had ever had before.

It was from this house that I married Jarvis. He came to us as valet to a dear old gentleman who took our drawing-rooms for the season, being a widower, and having a beautiful place in the

country, but spending most of his time travelling in foreign parts. He was very odd in some of his ideas, was Mr. Delamere, that was his name, and nobody but Jarvis thoroughly understood him or knew how to humour him. He was quite sane, Jarvis said, but for all that, although over seventy years of age, he used to play battledore and shuttlecock with Jarvis in the drawing-room, and marbles, and spin a top, and play at all manner of boys' games. He said it kept him young. The first time I went into the room with a letter which had just been delivered for him, and saw Mr. Delamere and Jarvis down on their knees playing marbles on the carpet, I was so astonished that I stood quite still for a minute with my mouth wide open, and couldn't say anything.

Mr. Delamere looked up and smiled.

'I suppose you think it very odd, my dear, don't you, to see an old fogey like me playing marbles?'

'N—o, sir,' I stammered—'oh no!'

'Oh yes, you do; but it keeps me young, my

dear—keeps me young. Do you play battledore and shuttlecock, my dear?’

‘I—I used to, sir, when I—when I was a little girl.’

‘Ah, well, you’ll soon pick it up again. You must ask your mother to let you come and play with me sometimes of an afternoon, when Jarvis is out—eh, eh, will you?’

‘Y—yes, sir,’ I said, going quite red, it seemed so odd; ‘of course, if you wish it, I’ll try.’

And I had to, for Jarvis, as soon as he found I would, was artful, and he invented all manner of excuses to go out, or go and sit downstairs and smoke his pipe, and I used to play battledore and shuttlecock with Mr. Delamere, sometimes for an hour at a time, till he got tired, and then he would let me go, and amuse himself with a puff and dart, sticking a target up on the folding doors, and blowing across at it out of a tube, and most clever he was at it. He made me try to do it once, but directly I went to blow the tube I wanted to laugh—it seemed so ridiculous for an old gentle-



man like that to be always playing at children's games.

Mr. Jarvis made himself very agreeable to us, and his conversation was very amusing and instructive, he having been about to all the principal places in Europe with his master, and he used to tell us all about the people and the places, and we girls were never tired of listening to him, though dear mother, who hated foreigners through once having had a German lodger who smoked all over the place, and brought in dreadful things and wanted them cooked for his dinner, declared she could never abide them, and said their ways were outlandish and heathenish.

And sometimes, when I was going out, Mr. Jarvis would go with me, and he was very kind and used to get seats for the theatres, and once or twice he had tickets for the gallery at the Opera through knowing an Italian courier who travelled with one of the great singers, and he used to ask mother if he might take me; and I began to like him very much, for he was a handsome, lively young man in

those days, and very gentlemanly, and quite at ease with everybody through travelling about and always being with the best people. And gradually we fell in love, and he asked me if I would marry him some day, and I said he would have to speak to mother, and he did, and explained his prospects, and that he was sure that Mr. Delamere would be very good to him, and he knew money was left to him in his will, as he had been with him some years and never had a rebuke or an angry word; and when mother asked me if I liked Mr. Jarvis, and I told her that I did, it was settled and we were engaged.

Soon after the engagement was settled, James, Annie's brother-in-law, came to see us, and of course we told him all about it, and he was introduced to Jarvis and took to him at once, but he said he hoped we wouldn't be in a hurry to get married, as I was only nineteen, and if we would wait two years he would help us to take a house of our own, because he was sure that we were just the people to make a good lodging-house pay, and of course we were

very grateful, though Jarvis said he thought two years was a long time ; but he told me afterwards that, of course, it would give us a fine start if we both had money, as we should be able to begin in a good style.

When the London season was over, Mr. Delamere made up his mind to spend the winter at Nice, though Jarvis tried to persuade him that for once he might like a winter in London for a change, but it was no good. Mr. Delamere had made up his mind to go to Nice; and it was a very sad day for me when the luggage was all in the hall, and the cabs at the door, and I had to say good-bye to my sweetheart. He promised to write to me very often, and he cheered me up and told me he would try and get 'the guv'nor,' as he called him, back as early in the spring as possible, but I felt it was a dreadful time to wait.

Mr. Delamere was very nice to me when he went away. He told mother he had been very comfortable, and he should be sure to come back to us next season ; and then he looked very knowingly at me

and said, 'I suppose you would be very sorry if I didn't, eh, my dear?' and I blushed crimson, for I knew he must have found out all about our engagement, though Jarvis had agreed with us that it was best not to say anything about it, because Mr. Delamere, though very nice, was suspicious at times, and he might have thought, Jarvis being like one of the family, we might impose upon him in the way of extras and all that sort of thing; but my mother never was the woman to do things like that, and I am proud to say I have always followed her example, and never took the slightest advantage of anyone in my apartments, however careless they might be in looking over their bills; and I have always been most particular with my servants, knowing what trouble is sometimes caused by having girls who are not scrupulously honest about a house with lodgers in it. I remember once a diamond ring being missing, but of that I shall write when the time comes.

Jarvis was very good, and wrote me long letters every week, as he had promised to do, and sent

me some lovely presents—beautiful foreign things which we put on the sideboard in the drawing-room, and I was very proud of them, and three months went by without anything particular happening, except that one day when I and Annie were out with the baby in the park we saw her brother-in-law James walking with a lady, and talking very affectionately to her, and we both had the same idea that he might be going to get married; and though, of course, we weren't selfish, it made us a little nervous, because we knew enough of the world to know that if he had a wife of his own she might not care for him to be quite so kind or so liberal to us as he had been.

And later on our suspicions were confirmed, and it made a great difference to us eventually; that is to say, to mother and Annie, though not to me, as events turned out, but we were not to know that then, and it wasn't till after Mr. Delamere had come back and taken our rooms again for the season that James told us anything about it.

When Mr. Delamere came back we could all see

that he was very much altered. Jarvis had prepared us for this in his letters, and he had confessed he was rather alarmed because his master had suddenly seemed to have grown so much more feeble. But it didn't make much difference in his ways except that he didn't go out much, and gave up playing games that wanted much walking about. His principal amusement was to have the cloth taken off the table and build houses with a pack of cards, and once when he had built one up three stories high he was so pleased that he came outside on tiptoe and called gently over the banisters for us to come upstairs and see something.

He made us all come up quietly, and on to the landing, and then he went first on tiptoe, and I and mother and Annie and Jarvis all followed one behind the other on tiptoe, creeping into the room as if we'd committed a murder; and there, on the table, was his house of cards, and when we got in to see it, without any of us making it tumble down, the dear old gentleman was as pleased as a child, and he said he had tried it often, but he had never

been able to build a house and use up all the cards. He felt, he said, as if he had accomplished the feat of his life.

We hadn't been in the room a minute, trying not to laugh, before mother's cough came on, and down went the cards in a minute all of a heap, because mother's cough always did make the rooms shake except in the basement.

Of course she was very sorry, but Mr. Delamere said it didn't matter. He was quite satisfied with what he had done, and he didn't think he should ever attempt it again. Jarvis told us afterwards he had never seen his master so pleased before except once, some years before, when he had managed to print his own name and address with a toy printing press which he had bought in the Lowther Arcade, after trying for nearly a week, and having to pay nearly five pounds for the damage he had done to the drawing-room chairs with the printer's ink and things.

Poor, dear Mr. Delamere ! It was to be the last amusement he was ever to have, building that

house of cards, for though he went to bed quite comfortably that night, saying, 'By Jove, Jarvis! I did it, you know,' and still as pleased as Punch about it, when Jarvis went to call him in the morning he found him looking very curious in bed, and not being able to make him speak, ran downstairs and told us to go for a doctor at once, and when the doctor came he said Mr. Delamere had had a stroke of apoplexy in the night, and a few days afterwards he was dead and was taken away to be buried down near his own lovely place in the country, which passed to a distant relative. But he had left Jarvis five hundred pounds.

Directly the funeral was over and everything arranged, Jarvis came to us and he said that he thought we had much better be married soon now, as he didn't want to take another place, but start business with his little capital, and he was sure he could manage well, as he would start with a good connection, knowing so many couriers and valets who would recommend him if he had apartments; and I wrote to James, and he came, and we talked



it all over, and he said, 'Very well ; perhaps it was best ;' and though, owing to circumstances—he was going to marry that lady—he couldn't lend us any capital to put into the house, he would give us two hundred pounds towards furnishing one, and we thought that was very kind of him, and felt as though our fortunes were made.

And one beautiful September day we were married. Ah, it seems all so long ago now, but I can see the church and mother crying, and Annie, poor dear ! with a sad look on her face, and I knew what she was thinking of—the day when she was a happy bride and never thought how short her happiness was to be. But Jarvis looked so handsome and so happy that I couldn't cry, though I felt I wanted to, and he said his responses, as James said afterwards, as though he had married half-a-dozen times before, and when he put the ring on my finger and said he took me to be his lawful wedded wife till death did us part, a great lump came up into my throat, and everything seemed like a dream, and the clergyman's voice

and everything just like the humming that you hear in the fields on a summer's day when you close your eyes in the sunshine and only know that everything is peace.

We had one happy week at Brighton for our honeymoon. When I think of that week now, after all the long years, I forget that I am an old woman, and I wonder if the poor dear who worried me so afterwards—I'm sure he never meant to—could ever have been the gentle, loving companion of those happy days. But, of course, trouble and worry will alter people. You can't go on living in a honeymoon, with a big house to look after, and a dozen people's whims and fancies to study, and everybody wanting dinner at the same time, and continually grumbling from morning till night, and careless servants, and all that sort of thing, and Jarvis was only mortal, and couldn't help developing 'nervous irritability,' as the doctors called it, which he said he got from his mother. Poor woman, I never knew her, as she was dead before we married, but she must have been a trial, for I know Jarvis

was to me ; and when he got, in late years, quite unbearable, he always excused himself by saying his poor mother was just the same.

He didn't tell me about his mother before we were married—at least, not about her peculiarities which he inherited—and I'm glad he didn't, poor fellow, for I had quite enough of it afterwards. But he meant well, and I dare say he really couldn't help it. But he *was* trying ; and yet, with all his queer ways and temper, I would give a good deal to see him in the old chair by the fire to-night as I write these lines, and hear him grumbling away at everything, and twisting about with the rheumatics, and staring into the fireplace, and asking why he was ever born, until at last I used to say, 'Oh, my dear, do for goodness' sake leave off, or I shall have to go and walk up and down outside and scream.'

But it wasn't till after we had been married some time and worries began to come that Jarvis began to take after his poor mother. At first we were very, very happy indeed, and we were just like two children playing at keeping house, except that, of

course, we had to look business-like and serious before the lodgers.

It was a very nice house and looked beautiful, when we came back and found mother and Annie there to meet us, and the new servants and everything spick and span, and our first lodgers—a lady and gentleman for our drawing-room floor—coming in next week, recommended by a friend of Mr. Delamere's who had known Jarvis, and the parlours, or dining-room floor, I ought to say, I suppose, looked at by a lady whose sister and her husband were coming to town to be under the care of a London physician; and our own rooms quite lovely with all the pretty things Jarvis had collected on his travels, all set out in our sitting-room on a handsome chiffonier, and a portrait of Mr. Delamere, which the gentleman who had come into the property had allowed us to have, hanging in the hall, and a canary singing in its cage, and a black cat that had come into the house, as mother said, to bring us luck, purring away on the hearthrug as though he'd been born and bred there.

And that is how I started in life as a landlady, but though I felt very happy I couldn't help being a little nervous at first before our first lodgers came. I knew a good deal, of course, through having been with mother so long, but still it was a serious responsibility, and I wanted everything to be nice and comfortable, and if it had been a prince and princess coming to stay with us I couldn't have been more anxious or taken more trouble.

And the day they came I went over the rooms half-a-dozen times with the duster in my hand and looked at everything, and wondered if there was anything I had forgotten ; and Jarvis came up too, and we wondered, as it was a dull day and the wind a little chilly, though only early September, if we ought to light a fire or not ; and then we listened to every cab that came along, wondering if it would be them, when a cab with luggage did stop. Jarvis had just been seeing if the register was all right, and had put the poker up the chimney to put it back and some soot came down all over his face, and I had gone upstairs to get my gold watch and

chain, which I had forgotten in the anxiety, and the black cat had followed me, and my hearing heavy wheels stop, I trod on his tail, and he spat, and I jumped and knocked a jug of water all over my dress, and looked as if I was drowned, and our housemaid, who should have answered the bell, had, of course, just gone up to change. Housemaids always are changing their dress when anybody important comes to the front-door; and after the bell had rung twice our cook—though an excellent cook, she was very fat, and had her face tied up with neuralgia—thinking, I suppose, it was her duty to do something, as nobody seemed to be coming down, went to the front-door just as she was in a dirty apron, and left a saucepan to boil over on the fire, which you knew at once all over the house; and that's how our first drawing-rooms were received. And when I think of it now and remember what my poor Jarvis looked like rushing downstairs all soot, and meeting the lady face to face in the front hall, it makes me go hot all over, and I feel as if I could cry again with vexation as I did then.

But *they*, the lady and gentleman, seemed to notice nothing. I wondered why then. It wasn't to be long before I knew. I saw that the lady's face was very pale, and the gentleman looked at her anxiously. If I had known then what was in their thoughts I should have understood why even the soot upon poor Jarvis's face passed unnoticed.

They had something else on their minds—something that makes me shudder when I think of it. What that *something* was I shall tell you in my next memoir.

## II.

### *OUR FIRST DRAWING-ROOMS*

‘JARVIS,’ I said to my husband, after our first people had been with us about a week, ‘there’s something about Mr. and Mrs. Leeson that I don’t understand.’

‘What do you mean, Susan?’ he said. ‘You don’t think there is anything wrong about them? They paid their bill directly it was sent up, and they didn’t grumble at any of the extras.’

‘I should think not, indeed!’ I replied; ‘and I don’t see how they could, seeing that we’ve tried to make everything as light as possible, and left out many things that dear mother always charged.’

And it was a fact that we had, saying nothing about ‘cruets,’ which is a most valuable weekly item; also ‘kitchen fire,’ which dear mother



always charged so much a week, saying she couldn't be expected to use her coals to cook other people's dinners for nothing; but Jarvis and I had been a little nervous at first, being naturally anxious to please, and being both of us, as you can easily understand, a little timid with the first bill; and I'm sure there was very little that we made out of our first let, seeing the expense we had gone to to make everything satisfactory. It wasn't them not grumbling at anything that set me wondering about the Leeson's, because we never gave them the chance, doing our best to make them comfortable directly we got over the confusion of their arrival just at the moment when there was nobody presentable to go to the front door and welcome them through the things happening I told you about in my first memoir.

What I didn't understand was their name being Leeson, and going into their rooms once or twice and noticing things such as pocket-handkerchiefs marked 'J. A.' hers and 'F. A.' his. I knew, of course, hearing them talk to each other, that her

name was Jane and his name was Frederick ; but how could 'A.' stand for Leeson ? And on some of their boxes there was a great piece of white paper pasted on the middle, and the initials 'J. L.' on that ; and I said to myself when I'd seen the handkerchiefs and some of the things out of her dressing-bag that were on the dressing-table, and all with the monogram 'J. A.,' 'They put those labels on the boxes because their right initials are underneath, and would look odd coming into a house, perhaps.'

I was sure there was something wrong directly they came, because they didn't look happy, and didn't seem to notice anything much, and were so easily satisfied, and said so little when I bustled about and tried to make them feel comfortable and at home.

I was sure they were respectable, because they were recommended by a friend of Mr. Delamere's, who had known Jarvis, and of course we wanted no other reference but that. But sometimes when I went into the room I could see that the lady (she

was about forty-five, I should say, but a very beautiful woman still, with a sweet, gentle face) had been crying, and didn't want me to see it, and they always left off talking when I came into the room, and Mr. Leeson, who was a military-looking man of about fifty, would turn his back and be doing something to the fire, or go and stare out of the window. And I noticed they did not have any letters come to our house, which I thought was odd; but I am sure they had letters come somewhere else, because once or twice after Mr. Leeson came home—he used to be out nearly all day—there were bits of envelopes in the fireplace that hadn't been burnt up; and once I heard her say, as he went into the room, 'Has Johnson written?' and he said 'Yes.'

These are the things that made me say to Jarvis that I didn't understand the Leesons, and he said that certainly there was a mystery, and I said I hated mysteries, preferring everything straightforward, and it wasn't nice to have one come into your house as your first start, and I thought we

would go round to mother's and tell her about it, and she with her experience might have had something like it, and be able to understand it, perhaps.

So the next evening, Mr. and Mrs. Leeson having said that they were going to dine at a friend's house and would not be back till late, we went to mother's to tea, and told her all about our mysterious drawing-rooms.

'Oh, my dear!' said mother at once, 'it's as plain as the nose on your face, and a dreadful thing it is, especially if it gets out, as it's so bad for your house, the address always being published.'

You may be sure that sent my heart down into my boots, and poor Jarvis went quite white, gasping, 'Good gracious, mother! What *do* you think it is?'

'Why, it's quite plain, no letters coming and her crying. It's an elopement, and she's left her husband, and they're living under a false name to prevent being found.'

'You mean Mrs. Leeson is not Mr. Leeson's wife, mother?' I said, quite horrified.

'Of course not; she's somebody else's—it's very

dreadful ; but you are always liable to that in letting apartments, which is what they make for generally, hotels being too public ; but it's very bad luck to have that sort of thing for your first.'

Jarvis was very downcast for a minute, seeing, as he said, proceedings and scandal in the papers, and our address published, and me called as a witness, with perhaps my portrait in one of the illustrated papers ; but presently he looked up and said, ' No, it's not that, and I'm quite sure you're wrong. Mr. Delamere's friend would never have sent me a divorce to start with, I'm sure, and he said they were very good people.'

' Of course,' I said, brightening up ; ' and besides, if they weren't married how would their real initials be " J. A." and " F. A." ? That's not likely. No, I'm quite sure they're married, and it's not divorce they're afraid of.'

Annie, who had been thinking too, agreed with me at once, and mother herself said she thought perhaps she was wrong, as the recommendation and the initials were so far satisfactory. There

was only one other thing she could think of. If the trouble wasn't love it must be money. Perhaps he'd done something wrong about money. She had had one or two lodgers who had been like that—one, a most gentlemanly young man, who never went out, and had his letters come addressed to Mr. Smith, with 'H. J.' on his collars and cuffs and things, and he was taken away one night by two detectives, who pretended they came to look for apartments, and opened the door and walked straight in and arrested him there and then on a charge of forgery. He got seven years, and a nicer, quieter, more respectable young man you could never wish to have in a house, though he left a fortnight in debt, and the police took away all his things, and found a revolver in his portmanteau, which he was going to shoot himself with, which, thank goodness, dear mother said, he didn't have the chance of doing, as a suicide in a house is dreadful, and it's months before you can let the room again, and often lose your other lodgers through it.

But we could see it wasn't anything wrong with the money, because of Mr. Delamere's friend, who was a county magistrate, and wasn't likely to send us a forgery or embezzlement, or anything of that sort. So at last mother said : ' Well, all I can say is this : it's a mystery.' And as we knew that ourselves, mother's experience didn't help us very much, though we had a pleasant evening all together, and mother cried when we went, and said how she wished poor Annie had been as fortunate in her marriage as I was in mine.

When we got home it was nearly eleven, but the Leasons had not come in, and when I went upstairs that careless Fanny, our servant, had let their fire go right out, and lighted the gas, and left it full on all the time, and let the kitten go upstairs and get on the mantelshelf and knock a vase over that Jarvis had paid more than a sovereign for in Paris ; and I could have taken her by the shoulders and shaken the hussy ; and this the very first time my back was turned, too ; but she was so humble over it, and cried, and said she had fallen asleep, not

having had a wink for nights, through cook keeping her awake with neuralgia, and I forgave her ; but it was most vexatious, being likely to make me afraid ever to leave the house of an evening again, and I said to Jarvis that I was sure those Leeson's would be unlucky to us, and this was the beginning.

He was cross himself at first, but he said I'd better look over it, as Fanny was very willing and hardworking, and a smart, nice-looking girl about the house, and that was one thing that was very strong in Jarvis's character, I noticed, as time went on. He was always ready to make excuses for any of the servants if they were good-looking ; but the ugly ones he never said a word for. And other ladies have told me the same thing about their husbands when we have been talking over our troubles with servants.

We sat up for Mr. and Mrs. Leeson, and I saw that the fire was lighted and made to burn up and look cheerful, and about twelve they came home, and I let them in myself, having let Fanny go to bed ; and so I had a good look at them in the hall,



and I noticed they looked ill, both of them, and worried, and I said to Jarvis that night, before I went to sleep, that I was sure the mystery, whatever it was, was a very dreadful one, and I should never rest till I'd got to the bottom of it or they'd gone away.

But it wasn't a mystery much longer. The very next morning I went into the sitting-room to see if Fanny had dusted it properly and if breakfast was laid nicely, and everything comfortable and as it should be, when Mr. Leeson came into the room, evidently very upset, and he said :

'Mrs. Jarvis, can you tell me where there is a doctor near? I must go for one, as my wife is very ill.'

I said that he need not go ; we would send. And I went down and sent Jarvis off at once, telling him to find out the nearest, as we did not know any, not having had any need of one, thank goodness, since we had been in our new home. He said he knew there was one at the end of the street, as he had seen the brass plate, and in a few minutes

he was back with a Dr. Aston, who was afterwards always called in by us, he proving himself to be such a clever and nice, kind man, and not constantly coming whether he was wanted or not, like some doctors do when once they get their foot inside your door, to make a bill.

He was upstairs some time, and when he came down I was in the hall to let him out, and I said: 'I hope it's nothing serious, doctor?' naturally having a horror of illness in the house, remembering dear mother, and what scarlet fever did for her one season.

He said: 'No; but she is very ill, poor lady. It is more mental than anything. She has some trouble on her mind. I'm going to do the best I can for her, but be sure the house is kept quiet for a day or two.'

I promised I would, and went downstairs at once and stopped cook banging away at the kitchen fire—a dreadful habit of hers, and most ruinous in coals. I'm sure the fire that woman would make up to cook a piece of bacon would have roasted an

ox, but she always pretended it was the fault of the range, though I knew better ; and I told Fanny not to ‘clomp’ about going up and down stairs, and to put the cloth over the canary’s cage, to make him think it was bedtime and leave off singing, for there never was such a bird to sing when you didn’t want him to, and not to when you did ; and I sent in next door with my compliments, and begged the young ladies not to practise as someone was ill, and though the message sent back was most unneighbourly, they left off, though they evidently took it as an offence, and what I suffered afterwards nobody knows. Never, I think, was a poor woman so bothered by neighbours as I have been.

I was just sitting down, rather flustered with one thing and another, to my own breakfast, when a knock came at our door. It was Mr. Leeson. He was in a great state, poor man, and he said he was very sorry to trouble me, but he must go out and be out all day, and would I mind sitting with his wife, as he didn’t like to leave her all alone? I

said of course I would only be too pleased to be of service, and so, when he went out, I went up and sat down in the bedroom, and asked Mrs. Leeson how she felt.

Poor dear ! I knew she must be very bad by the way she was moaning and going on ; her nerves evidently being quite upset. Every now and then she was quiet for a little while, and then she would clasp her hands and say : ‘ My boy, my boy ! Oh, my poor boy ! ’

And I began to think then that the mystery must be about their son, as, of course, they had one, or she wouldn’t say ‘ my boy.’

After I had sat there about an hour she seemed to be asleep, and Fanny came up and said I was wanted downstairs, and I went down quietly, and was gone about a quarter of an hour, and was just going upstairs again to see how Mrs. Leeson was ; but when I got into the hall who should I see there going towards the front door but Mrs. Leeson herself, dressed, with her bonnet on !

‘ Oh, ma’am ! ’ I screamed, ‘ whatever are you

doing? Pray don't go out. The doctor's orders are that you are to be kept quite quiet.'

'Don't stop me,' she said; 'oh, don't stop me! I must go. I heard him calling me.'

I made a step towards the door as if to stop her, but she turned round and cried out at the top of her voice:

'Woman, let me go! They are trying my boy for his life, and my place is by his side!'

It was so awful, what she said, that for the moment it bewildered me, and I wasn't able to move, and before I had recovered myself she was out in the street and the door banged behind her.

I couldn't run out and shriek, 'Stop her! stop her!' though, perhaps, I ought to have done so. I rushed downstairs screaming, and called to Jarvis, and he was in his shirt-sleeves, trying to put the kitchen sink right, that that careless hussy of a cook had stopped up emptying fat down it, and I said: 'Jarvis, for God's sake, go after her—she's gone!' and he was dazed and couldn't understand what I meant, and I told him as well as I was able,

and said I was sure she was mad; and he ran upstairs and out into the street with no coat on and his shirt-sleeves rolled up, and ran up and down the street, everybody staring at him. But there was no trace of Mrs. Leeson to be seen, and we went everywhere, but could hear nothing of her, and I was so overwrought that I dropped into a chair and went off into hysterics myself.

I didn't know whatever I should say to Mr. Leeson if she didn't come back before he did, and I knew now what an awful trouble theirs was, for when I told Jarvis what she had said he turned quite white, and said it must be the murder case that was to be tried that day, and there was a lot about it in the papers. It was a young man named Frederick Armitage, and he was being tried for having shot a young fellow in a wood in the country, they having previously quarrelled about a young lady they were both in love with; and the evidence was very strong, young Mr. Armitage having the previous day been heard to say that he would do for him, and was found with a gun in his hand

leaning over the young fellow, who was dead, with the shots in his head.

I saw at once that it must be the case : the F A. of Mr. Leeson would be Frederick Armitage, and the son would be named after the father, and, of course, they had come to us in another name—not wanting, which was natural, everybody to know they were the father and mother of a young man being tried for murder.

I don't know how ever I got through that day. I felt as if I had committed a murder myself, and I sent Jarvis to tell the doctor what had happened, and I sat waiting and waiting and hoping every minute the poor creature would come back. The doctor, when he heard all about it, said she would go to the Old Bailey, where the trial was, and he said he would go there himself, and he did, and came back later and said the trial was on, but Mrs. Leeson was not there, and he had not told Mr. Leeson, poor man ! what had happened, he having quite enough to bear seeing his son in the dock, perhaps going to be sentenced to death.

It was all so dreadful that it made me quite ill myself, and the doctor insisted that I should go upstairs and lie down, and try not to think about it, and he and Jarvis would do their best ; and he gave me something to soothe my nerves, but it might as well have been cold water, for I kept having fainting fits and going hot and cold. I seemed to see the whole scene : the judge, and that young man being tried for his life ; and when I thought of his poor father there and his mother wandering about half-mad, I wonder how I kept my senses through that dreadful day.

I lay till about five o'clock upstairs, Jarvis coming up now and then, and being very kind ; but feeling himself, I know, very upset over such an awful tragedy in our house, and our first let in life, too ! and about five I said I would come down and have a cup of tea. I couldn't lie there any longer.

And when I went downstairs about six o'clock there came a loud knock at the front-door, and I, thinking it was Mrs. Leeson, perhaps, brought



back by somebody, went up, hardly knowing how my legs carried me; and there was Mr. Leeson himself and a handsome young fellow as white as a ghost, and Mr. Leeson, tears in his eyes and his voice trembling and shaking all over, never noticed me, but said, 'Come in, Fred, come in, and stay here while I go up and break it to your mother. The shock of seeing you suddenly might be too great.' I knew at once, of course, that the young man was acquitted, and then I felt my heart go quite cold. How was I to tell Mr. Leeson that his wife wasn't there—that we didn't know what had become of her?

But I had to. I had to stop him just as he was going up the stairs, and I had to say, 'Oh, sir, she's gone!'

'Gone!' he gasped; 'not—not—dead?'

'No, sir,' I said, hardly being able to speak for sobbing; 'she dressed unbeknown to me and went out; she said she was going to see her son.'

He seemed quite stupefied at first.

'Gone!' he said; 'gone! But—she didn't come

to the court ; I—I should have seen her. Where—where can she be ? She must be found at once. God knows what she may do in the state she is ! Come, Fred,’ he said ; ‘you must help me ; we must find your poor mother at once.’

And in a moment they were gone, and I thought to myself how awful it was : a young man only just acquitted of murder, and having to rush about all over London looking for a mad mother who didn’t know what his fate might be.

It seems—for they told me all about it afterwards—that they had gone to the police-station and inquired and been able to find no trace of the poor lady, and were wandering about like madmen for two hours, when at one of the stations they went into they heard that a lady like they described had been seen wandering about up at Hampstead, and that a policeman there, thinking her manner very strange and fearing she might be going to drown herself or something of that sort, spoke to her, and her answers were so queer that he took her to the station and she was being detained there, they not

being able to get out of her who she was or where she lived. And they went off there and then, and the poor thing was sitting moaning by the fire in the inspector's room, he seeing that she was a lady, and it seems that she wouldn't say who she was, having some strange idea that if she did it would be bad for the boy, making it appear she thought he was guilty, which, of course, was all her head being queer through the trouble and the strain of that dreadful day.

Mr. Leeson went in alone to see her, telling his son to go back to our place, and he would break it to his mother as he brought her home, so it shouldn't be a shock.

And it seems when she saw her husband she just staggered up, and, seeing the worry in his face, thought the worst, and went off in a dead swoon, and they brought her home to our place, and we did all we could, you may be sure, but it was some time before she was allowed to see her son, and when she did I was in the room, not liking to leave her, and I shall never forget it. Poor thing! She

gave one wild cry, and flung her arms about her son's neck and sobbed, 'Thank God, thank God ! My boy, my boy !'

I'm sure that I felt more dead than alive that night when I sat down to supper, and I couldn't touch a bit. It seemed to me for all the world as if I had been in the Chamber of Horrors at Madame Tussaud's for several hours in the dark, and I shook like an aspen leaf when a brute of a boy only went by and rattled the railings, which was a thing that always did make me jump, even in the best of health. And I was obliged to have a little brandy, I felt so faint; and when I was a little calmer, Jarvis, who had been out and bought the evening papers, read me out the trial, and I could see it all as if I was there, knowing the principal actors in it, as they say. And it seems the evidence really was terrible against the young man upstairs through his having made that wild threat, and undoubtedly having been the cause of the other poor young fellow's death. But it seems he had declared all along that it was an accident; that he

was in a wood shooting, and not dreaming of doing anybody any harm, when the other young man came along, and they had high words, and that, going to take a step forward, his foot caught in something on the ground, and he stumbled and nearly fell, and the gun went off, and the contents lodged in the other poor young fellow's head and killed him.

Of course there was only his bare word for that, and nothing to bear it out, so it looked very black against him, but at the trial a man came forward and bore out the whole story—a man who had seen it all, and been afraid to speak before because he was a man who was wanted by the police there, having committed a robbery from his employer, and it seems he had come into the wood that day to meet his sweetheart and find out from her if anything was being done about him, and he saw it all, and it was only when the trial came on that he determined to risk everything and come forward and speak the truth and save young Mr. Leeson's life, and it was his story, at such a risk to himself,

that made the jury find young Mr. Leeson 'Not guilty.'

And I was glad to hear afterwards that he lost nothing by it, for though he was arrested—the man who had seen it, I mean—and taken back and tried, only a nominal punishment was given him.

Jarvis read me the trial of young Mr. Leeson right through; and although I knew, of course, how it was going to end, I felt quite anxious, as the counsel against him made out the case, and the evidence was called, and I saw how easily it might have gone the other way, and I couldn't help thinking of what an awful thing it would have been for his poor father and mother, and wondering whatever they would have felt that night. But, thank goodness, it wasn't to be; but when we went to bed that night I said to Jarvis that I did hope we should never let to any more tragedies, or he'd wake up one morning and find me gone gray; and I had nothing but the most dreadful dreams all night, waking up once on my back just as the judge was

sentencing Jarvis for murdering somebody, but who it was I couldn't quite make out.

Mr. and Mrs. Leeson, or, to give them their right name now, Mr. and Mrs. Armitage, only stayed with us a few days till she was well, for the shock and the worry had left her very weak, and then they went away with their son, telling us they were going abroad for a month or two, not caring to go back home just yet till the excitement of the trial was all over, especially as the friends of the poor young fellow who had been killed lived in their neighbourhood, and they felt it deeply, though now it was proved to have been an accident, and would feel it all their lives.

And of course, although I felt very sorry for them, I really was rather glad when they went, for I couldn't get the story out of my mind, and whenever I saw them I always, somehow or other, associated them with the Old Bailey. But they were very nice and very grateful for all we had done, and Mrs. Armitage thanked me herself, and said she should never forget me for my kindness and

sympathy on that dreadful day; and afterwards they wrote to me when they had settled down at home, and a really nice letter it was, and I have it put away somewhere now, though it is so many years ago that I quite forget where it is.

We never forgot our first drawing-rooms, you may be sure, but we never told the story to any of our other people who came afterwards, and were fond of gossiping, because I felt it was almost like saying 'there was a murder committed in this room,' though of course there wasn't; but it might have been very terrible if the jury had gone the other way, and we had always had to remember that our first tenants were a mother and father, whose son — but, dear, dear! it doesn't do even to think about it.

When I told dear mother what the mystery was she was very much astonished, and said she should never have guessed that, and how fortunate it was that everything ended as it did; and she said she hoped we weren't always going to have strange cases, some people being very unlucky that way,



she herself having known a widow lady who let apartments and had two suicides and one attempted murder in three years, and was then empty for six months, and then let to a most respectable young couple, who seemed to have plenty of money, and were both arrested in her front hall just as they were going out, on a charge of chloroforming a jeweller's assistant in their previous lodgings, and getting a thousand pounds' worth of diamonds from him, and, as she said, it was a wonder they hadn't all been murdered in their beds.

After that it was a long time, you may be sure, before I felt quite easy about anybody new for a night or two, no matter what their references; and if I hadn't been so frightened of firearms I would have made Jarvis sleep with a revolver under his pillow, only I was afraid it might go off in the night, he being so restless at times, especially when he began to develop that dreadful insomnia, which he said he inherited from his poor dear mother.

Our next 'let,' the people who took our dining-rooms, were very different; but I must leave the dining-rooms for another memoir.

### III.

#### *THE OLD LADY ON THE THIRD FLOOR.*

I HAVE often said to Jarvis that nobody could know what queer characters there were in the world who hadn't kept a lodging-house, and at first he used to say that he didn't believe that anybody else had such odd people, but that we seemed to have been specially selected by fate to receive them ; and I remember once when I was terribly put out through an old lady who was very rich, but lived all by herself up on our third floor, and gave more trouble than anybody I ever had under my roof, ' Jarvis,' I said, ' is it possible that people can be under the impression that this is a private lunatic asylum ?' But afterwards, when I came to know several ladies and gentlemen in our profession, and to hear the stories they had to tell, I came to the conclusion

that everybody was more or less mad, only it wasn't until you had an opportunity of seeing them every day amid their domestic surroundings that you knew it.

That old lady on the third floor—Miss Gresham her name was—came to us one hot July day that there was a card over our front door fanlight, 'Apartments,' and gave a knock and a ring that made everybody in the house jump and the tins rattle together on the kitchen mantelshelf, and when I went up myself, thinking that it was at least royalty come in its own carriage to call on the Irish peer who had taken our drawing-rooms for a month, she said, in a voice that sounded like a drill sergeant's with a bad attack of asthma :

'You have lodgings to let here?'

She was over six feet, this old lady, with a face and a figure like a man's, and quite a moustache, and dressed anyway, or, rather, no-way, and not looking up to very much, and being so gruff and off-hand, I said :

‘We have apartments vacant, madam.’

And that is a point on which I was always very particular. You will see in some houses ‘Rooms to let,’ in others ‘Lodgings,’ in others ‘Apartments to let,’ and in others ‘Apartments,’ and that is the most aristocratic and the only thing you see in really first-class houses.

She looked at me in what I thought a very haughty way, and just said :

‘Oh, in my time they were called lodgings. I’ll see the rooms.’

‘They are two guineas a week, madam,’ I said, looking on the top of her four-wheel cab, and seeing only two big, rather battered-looking old boxes, and a bundle which I didn’t at all like the look of, as I distinctly saw the handle of a frying-pan sticking out of it.

‘And no extras?’

‘No, madam.’

‘Then I’ll see them.’

And with that she came into the hall, and so I had to go upstairs and show her the rooms on the

third floor. She made a lot of remarks, finding fault with this and that, and at last, after she'd asked me no end of unnecessary and as I thought impertinent questions, I said :

‘I'm afraid they won't suit you, madam.’

‘That's my business,’ she said. ‘I think they will.’

‘Very well, madam,’ I said. ‘Will you kindly give me your references?’

‘Certainly,’ she said. ‘You can refer to my bankers, National Bank, Charing Cross. I suppose that will do?’

‘Oh yes, madam,’ I said; ‘but it will take time.’

‘Oh, nonsense! send down now; it's not far. Miss Gresham my name is. I'll go and settle with the cabman, and you can have my things brought up.’

And with that she turned on her heel and marched down the stairs, grumbling all the way. She said the stairs were steep and the wallpaper hideous, and she wondered we had gas in the house; it was so unhealthy; and she actually had

the impudence to ask me when the banisters were dusted last, and by the time she got to the front door my face was crimson and I felt I should like to have got up on a hall chair and taken her by the shoulders and shaken her.

Of course I could have objected to her coming until we had taken her references up, but I really didn't know what to do. She seemed such a determined woman, and quite frightened me, and Jarvis was no more good than a child in that sort of thing. If he only so much as heard me raise my voice either with a servant or a lodger about anything he'd suddenly remember he had to see to something, and would put on his hat and go out. He used to say he hated a scene, and he never could say boh ! to a goose ; and if the house had been left to him, wouldn't have dared to have called his soul his own, but would have been robbed and imposed upon right and left, though he could always find his tongue if he wanted to argue with me or find fault with his dinner, or anything of that sort,

So in Miss Gresham came, after standing outside a quarter of an hour haggling with the cabman, and getting quite a crowd round, and at last sending for a policeman and insisting on him dragging her boxes off the roof because the cabman used bad language, and said she was no lady, and she shouldn't have her boxes till she'd paid her legal fare, which was two shillings—she having offered him one and sixpence, the distance being under three miles, but she had forgotten about twopence extra each package, and the two boxes, and the bundle with the frying-pan in it came to the other sixpence. While the scene was going on I pulled the door nearly to, for I felt quite ashamed, especially as our nobleman in the drawing-rooms came and shouted over the banisters and wanted to know what all the noise outside was about.

She paid the money at last and got in, and as soon as she was upstairs I left her and sent Jarvis off to the bank, and when he came back and said reference to a bank must be made through another

bank I felt most indignant, and I said I was sure the woman was a swindler, and we should have her going out with the spoons and forks and the clock and the tablecloth, having just heard of a case of that sort four doors up.

So I went upstairs and told her, but she said, 'Oh, you needn't be frightened; here is a week's rent in advance;' and she gave me two guineas, so I felt that was all right and was easier in my mind. But I made certain we should have trouble with her, and she was on my mind all that night, and I couldn't sleep, and woke up with a start, having had a nightmare, in which an old lady eight feet six was trampling on my chest because I wouldn't take eighteenpence for a week's rent, including damage done through putting a hot frying-pan down on the new carpet.

She stayed with us three years, Miss Gresham did, and paid her rent regularly, and we got to understand her in time, but a more trying woman never took furnished apartments in anybody's house—of that I am certain.



She was very rich, having no end of money in the bank, and in railways, and all that sort of thing, but *mean* was not the word for what she was, and I soon understood the frying-pan, for she hardly had any meat, but cooked things for herself upstairs over one of those spirit-lamp affairs! And she would even keep the cinders from the end of one fire season to the beginning of the next, as I found out one day, looking in her cupboard and seeing six biscuit-boxes and opening one out of curiosity, and they were all filled with cinders.

I shall never forget once when she had a rabbit up in her room, which she had bought on Saturday cheap, and I went up on Sunday, and she wanted me to take it down and cook it, and it horrified me, and I said, ‘Oh, Miss Gresham, you can’t eat this,’ and she said, ‘Oh yes, she had only paid fourpence-halfpenny for it at a stall, but if it was cooked at once it would be all right.’ So I took it down and told Jarvis to cook it; but while it was being done I went to church, and poor Jarvis, who always stayed at home when I went out in case of

anything being wanted, sat on the kitchen-stairs and smoked a cigar all the morning, for fear the Irish nobleman should detect anything wrong; and we wouldn't have had him leave for anything, as having a lord in the house was so good for us, there being nothing like being able to say, when anyone hesitated about your rooms, ' These are the apartments that Lord —— occupied, and his lordship stayed with us for some time.'

I often had words with Miss Gresham; but I only really quarrelled with her once, and that was about the cat. She hated cats, and had a cane up in her room, and if ever our Tommy went up on to her landing out she came and banged at the poor thing, and it was her doing this that made me go up to her and say that if she hit my cat she would have to go, and she said cats were thieves, and she would always drive them away, because once, four years ago, when she was in apartments, a cat came into her room and ran off with the wing of a fowl that would have lasted her for two days at the least, and she had always hated cats ever

since. Mean as she was, and really living on next to nothing a week, actually sometimes buying a penny meat-pie out of doors, or a baked potato at a stall and bringing it in, I quite understood that the cat eating the wing of a fowl would weigh on her mind for the rest of her life.

We didn't get on so badly after I got to know her, for, with all her miserly ways and her queer ways, Miss Gresham had her good points, and I was persuaded that she hadn't always been like it. One day I was talking her over with my husband, and I said to him, 'Jarvis, I'm sure that with all her hardness and stinginess there has been a romance in that old lady's life upstairs.'

Of course, Jarvis must pooh-pooh the idea, like all the men; they fancy they know everything, and that women know nothing. He said she was an old skinflint, and if there was any romance about her it was money, for he was quite sure it couldn't be anything else. Very likely she had a million of money somewhere, and was trying to make it two: he could quite believe that, but as

to anything sentimental or human, he wouldn't have it.

I said time would show, and it did.

One day, much to my astonishment, Miss Gresham came downstairs into my room, and she said:

'Mrs. Jarvis, your drawing-rooms are empty, aren't they?'

'Yes, they are,' I said, never dreaming but that she was asking the question out of curiosity, or going to recommend somebody she knew.

'Could you let me have them for a week?'

She saw that I was so astonished at her wanting such a thing that I couldn't speak.

'I dare say you think it odd,' she said; 'but I have a gentleman coming to stay, and perhaps you'll let me have as good a dinner as you can to-morrow, please, and get in some wine for me—Mr. Jarvis will know—sherry and hock and champagne and port, and that sort of thing, and see that everything is nice for breakfast, and let

nothing be spared. Just for this week I'm going to be extravagant.'

I asked if the gentleman was going to stay, and she said, 'Yes, for the week,' and he would occupy the drawing-rooms, and, of course, they would breakfast and lunch and dine together, and perhaps there might be visitors while he was here; but everything was to be done as well as it could be to make him comfortable, and I was to be very careful not to say or do anything that would give the idea that she was mean while the visitors were there.

Of course, I said I would do my best, and she said she was sorry to trouble me, but really she knew nothing about providing except for herself.

She was dressed, when she came down to go out, in her old shabby things, but she came back an hour afterwards in a cab with a lot of boxes and parcels, and you might have knocked me down with a feather, but I had had all the astonishment taken out of me by her ordering grand dinners, and port, and champagne.

When I told Jarvis about it, and that Miss

Gresham wanted him to get in wine for her, he said he thought that we ought to send for a mad doctor to examine her at once or find out where her friends were, and get them to take her away, as she was evidently going insane and was having delusions. That was a comforting idea for a man to suggest to a wife who was worried as I was with the cares of a house, and I couldn't get it out of my head, but I couldn't go upstairs and say to Miss Gresham that I thought she was insane and refuse to execute her orders, seeing that her banker's reference had been most excellent, and she always paid to a day.

Mary, our parlourmaid, when I told her to go up and turn out the drawing-rooms, as Miss Gresham would want them to-morrow, nearly had a fit.

'What, ma'am,' she said; '*her!*'

And when I told her that there were to be dinner-parties, she said:

'Oh, lor, ma'am, whatever will she give them—fried-fish or a penny meat-pie each? I shall never be able to wait in the room for laughing.'

I told her she need have no fear—that everything was going to be of the best, and that there was to be champagne ; and then she said just what Jarvis had done—‘ Oh, ma’am, she’s gone mad !’ And that made me quite cross, for it was a most uncomfortable idea. I had read of such things, and remembered a case that had been in the papers of an old gentleman who had suddenly, after leading a quiet, modest life, had a delusion that he was a millionaire, and had gone out and ordered things to be sent home which had come to thousands of pounds ; and how his wife had terrible trouble for weeks, sending everything back that came to the door, and saying that her husband had taken leave of his senses, and after that having to go about with him everywhere, and after he’d bought things tell the people not to send them home.

I was so worried that I made an excuse to go up to the old lady’s room to ask her a question about the dinner, so that I might have a good look at her, and see if she betrayed any symptoms of insanity ; and when I knocked at the door, and she said

‘Come in,’ I thought I should have screamed at what I saw. She was in front of the glass, standing on a chair to see herself full length, and there were the boxes all over the place, and she had on a black satin gown and a lace collar, and a lovely little cap on the top of her head, and she turned round and said :

‘How do I look, Mrs. Jarvis?’

For a moment I stared at her open-mouthed, half expecting her to put straws in her hair, like the poor girl in the play of ‘Hamlet’ does, but she seemed quite calm, so I said :

‘Very well indeed, Miss Gresham ; but pray don’t stand on the edge of the chair ; it might tilt you over.’

She got down and turned round, and asked me if the dress fitted all right in the back, as she had bought it ready made, and I said, ‘Yes, fairly well ;’ and then she went and put on a mantle and a bonnet in the bedroom, and came out looking for all the world as if she was going to step into a carriage, but for her boots, which she had kept on,



and which looked worse than ever, as you may imagine, all the upper part of her being so grand. But she talked quite sensibly, so what could I do except feel terribly worried, and wonder what was going to happen ?

The next day the gentleman arrived in the afternoon. Quite an old gentleman, eighty if he was a day, but a fine, aristocratic man, with his white hair and his gold spectacles, and he walked straight up without a stick, and Miss Gresham was downstairs to receive him, and kissed him and said :

‘ Well, father, so you’ve come home at last ? ’

He looked at her and said : ‘ Yes, my child ; but, dear me, how you’ve altered ! ’

‘ Twenty years is a long time, father,’ she said. ‘ It does alter people, you know.’

And then they went upstairs to the drawing-room, and I said to Jarvis, who was looking at him through the glass door at the top of the kitchen stairs :

‘ It’s her father, and they haven’t met for twenty years.’

‘I heard that,’ said Jarvis, ‘but he doesn’t look as if he’d lived like her. He looks as if he’d had the best of everything, and might have come out of a bandbox.’

Mary was quite excited over it.

‘Fancy her having a pa, ma’am,’ she said, ‘and a nice old gentleman like that too! Well, wonders ’ll never cease! I wonder, ma’am, if she’ll put on diamonds for dinner!’

She didn’t, but she sat at the head of the table, and made herself most agreeable, Mary said, and she and the old gentleman chatted; and to hear her talk, Mary said, you would have thought she lived in luxury every day.

The next morning, when the bell rang after breakfast, I went up, as was my custom always, to see my lodgers and take the day’s orders myself; and there was Miss Gresham, in a new morning gown, if you please, looking quite the lady, and her father sitting in the easy chair, reading the paper; and he looked up at me through his gold glasses and said, ‘Good-morning;’ and I hoped he

was comfortable, and he said ‘Oh yes,’ but would I see that there was fruit of a morning for breakfast—grapes and peaches, and that sort of thing, as he preferred it for breakfast?

‘I’m so sorry, father,’ said Miss Gresham; ‘but I’d quite forgotten that.’

‘Of course, my child, of course. In twenty years one does forget little things.’

Then Miss Gresham turned to me and told me to be sure and get the best fruit I could, and have it on the breakfast-table every morning while her father was there, and she said there would be seven or eight to dinner that evening, and she left it to me.

I went downstairs, and I dropped into a chair, and it was a minute or two before I could speak, and Jarvis looked quite frightened.

‘Whatever is it, Susan?’ he said. ‘Nothing dreadful upstairs, I hope!’

‘Oh no,’ I said, ‘only grapes and peaches. *Grapes and peaches* every morning, and the price they are, and her saving her cinders in a biscuit-box!’

Jarvis was having his after-breakfast pipe when I told him, and he swallowed the smoke at the grapes and peaches, and would have choked if Mary and I hadn't slapped him on the back as hard as we could, and she kept on saying every time she hit him, 'Grapes and peaches,' and I said it too, and the words Jarvis uttered when he got his breath were 'Grapes and peaches!' And when I said 'What next?' Mary said 'Earthquakes'; but she always was an odd girl, and meant well, and so I excused her familiarity.

It was a grand dinner, for I saw we had to spare no expense, and several things we got at the confectioners'; and the guests came in evening dress, and old Mr. Gresham was in evening dress too, and we put our candelabra on the table, and there were twelve wax candles burning all at once; and Mary said the way they guttered when the door was open was enough to make Miss Gresham have apoplexy at any other time; but she didn't seem to notice it. There were six came to dinner—three young ladies and their husbands—all very good

people, I could see ; and they evidently hadn't seen Miss Gresham for years by the way they talked, Mary said, and had been asked to meet her papa, who, it seems, had been living in an outlandish part of America, called Texas, for twenty years ; and he was going away at the end of the week to Carlsbad—which is a place in Germany—for the benefit of his health, and then back to America, and that's why the party was.

Everybody enjoyed themselves very much, and they left at eleven. And Miss Gresham never so much as sent word down about anything not being touched from the dinner, but took no notice ; though, as Jane said, what came down would have kept her for twelve months as she used to live before her pa came. But that was no excuse for the silly girl going and eating so much of the ice pudding that was left—Jarvis and I not caring for it, and cook having neuralgia, as usual—that she had cramps in the stomach and rolling about on the floor, and had to be put to bed, and have brandy, and kept on saying she was going to die,

and she knew something dreadful would happen when Miss Gresham began 'chucking her money about.'

The old gentleman left at the end of the week, and directly he was gone Miss Gresham came down to me and said she was very much obliged, and how much did she owe? And when Jarvis had made out her account she paid him in bank-notes, and went upstairs to her own rooms on the third floor; and the next day, when I went up, she was there in her old clothes again, and wanted everything that was left from the day before brought up to her, and if she didn't give me a fortnight's notice, and say she was going away! And at the end of the time she went and left her extraordinary change as big a mystery as ever.

We often used to talk about her after she was gone, and wonder what it meant; and we made up our minds that she didn't want her pa and her friends to know she was a miser, for some reason. And we never should have known what it really meant, but about two years afterwards a gentle-

man called at our house and sent in a card with 'Mr. Greatbatch, Solicitor,' on it, and he wished to see Mr. Jarvis.

That gave us both a turn, for you never know what dreadful thing is going to happen when solicitors write to you or call on you. So I went upstairs and asked him into the dining-room, which was unoccupied at the time, and sent Jarvis to him, and shut the door, but listened outside, being nervous and anxious.

'I think, Mr. Jarvis,' I heard him say, 'that about two years ago a Miss Gresham lived in your house?'

'Yes, sir, she did,' said Jarvis.

'Can you tell me how she lived?'

'Well, sir, very poorly, though always a lady. She didn't seem to spend anything on herself; in fact, we thought she was a miser, till her father came to see her from America, and then she took our drawing-rooms, and lived in grand style for a week, and soon after she left.'

'Poor thing!' said the solicitor.

‘I hope she hasn’t gone mad, sir?’ said Jarvis.

‘She’s dead!’

When I heard that I opened the door and went in.

‘Dead!’ I said; ‘poor lady! I suppose she did go mad?’

‘Oh no!’ said the solicitor, ‘she was quite sane to the end. The reason I called on you was just for my own satisfaction. I wanted to know how long she had been practising this extraordinary self-denial, as I am interested for the people who get her money now she’s gone, and they want to know everything.’

And then he told us poor Miss Gresham’s story.

It seems that her father was a very rich man, having a large fortune with his wife, but after her death he took to speculating, and lost everything; and not only that, but he was a trustee for three young girls, the orphan daughters of an old friend, and he lost all their money too.

When his daughter, our Miss Gresham, heard about it—she had so many thousands of pounds that were settled on her under her mother’s will—



and when her father, being in difficulties, bolted to America with the remainder of the money and lived in Texas comfortably on it, she went into lodgings, and lived on next to nothing herself; and out of her income, which was a very good one, her mother having left her very well off, she paid the interest due to the three young ladies, and the balance she put every year at interest, letting it keep on accumulating, hoping in time that she would have made up the whole sum, so that they could all be paid.

But it seems they did not know how it was done, she having gone to their solicitor and begged him to keep her secret, and she would be responsible. And he, knowing that it was no good trying to prosecute Mr. Gresham in Texas, agreed that if she paid the interest, and would leave her money to the girls at the end, he would arrange that nothing should be done, and they were kept in ignorance, and only the selfish old humbug, her father, knew.

And she had lived meanly, and saved the cinders

in a biscuit-box, and half starved herself for over twenty years; and after that dinner-party, given for her father's sake, when he came back for a week, everything being forgotten, she went away from us into cheaper lodgings still, for it seems she had given him five hundred pounds, he saying he was in great want of money for his travelling expenses and his cure, and to get back to Texas. And so she had to starve, and save extra to make that up, and it was a hard struggle to do it, and when she died, it was in one room, where she lived without a friend calling on her, or knowing it; and the solicitor, with tears in his eyes, said that there was no doubt she had let herself get weak going without many things she wanted in the winter, and that brought about her death. But the money she had saved, with the principal of her fortune, was enough to pay back the trust fund her father had embezzled, and to bury the poor dear, too.

And that was the romance of the old lady on our third floor, and we never called her a miser after that day.

## IV.

### *THE FUSSY FAMILY,*

It was in our slack season that the Merediths came to us, and we were very glad to have them, because we had only the top-floor let at the time, and were a good way off the beginning of the London season. They came through a recommendation, having been told that we made everybody comfortable, and they took all the bedrooms we had to spare, and had the drawing-room for a sitting-room and the dining-room for their meals, being four in number without the maid they brought with them.

Mrs. Meredith was a very particular lady, it seems, being nervous of everything; and Mr. Meredith, who was a City merchant, explained when he came to settle about the apartments, that

it was while their own house in London was being redrained that they were looking for temporary accommodation, but if he didn't make sure that everything was right before his family moved into our place, his wife would never give him a moment's peace. First of all he wanted to be sure that we weren't on clay, and we told him we were built on gravel; then he wanted to know if we had any illness in the house, and were the rooms draughty at all, and were we in perfect sanitary repair, and did our servants slam the doors, or was there anybody in the house that whistled, and did the smell of cooking come up the stairs, and such a string of questions that it must have been quite three-quarters of an hour before I had satisfied him; and then, after he had decided to take the apartments and move in next week, he came back again, and said he'd forgotten to ask if there were any young children in the house, and had we a dog that barked, and did any of the neighbours keep fowls or anything that made a noise, and did any milk-carts go by early in the

morning? I assured him that he need have no fear on any of those points, and he went away; but in ten minutes he came back again, and said he had just noticed that there was a factory in a street at the back—were the workmen called by a steam-whistle? I said that they had been, but that it had been stopped owing to complaints; and then he asked if there was a church anywhere near where they had early morning service or rang bells, and I assured him there was not, and at last he appeared to be quite satisfied and went away, but for quite a quarter of an hour I expected him to come back and ask something else.

‘Jarvis,’ I said, as soon as my husband came in and I had told him all about it, ‘we are going to have a nice time with these people. Mrs. Meredith is evidently a fussy person, and she’ll be complaining of something or other all day long, and we shan’t have a minute’s peace. Don’t you think we’d better write and say we’ve found that there is a cock that crows three gardens down, or a gentleman who is learning the trumpet next

door, or something of that sort, and stop them coming?’

Jarvis shook his head.

‘No, my dear,’ he said; ‘we’d better take them—it’s a good let, and for two months, and that will just fill us up till the London season, and we can’t afford to go without the money. Besides, perhaps the lady won’t be so bad, after all. She does seem very particular, but really I don’t wonder at it, seeing what some apartments are. We are never disturbed by any noises here, so I don’t think we need trouble.’

I agreed with Jarvis that it wouldn’t do to lose such a let, but I wasn’t at all easy in my mind, especially as we had two new servants in, one who had a bad cough and was in bad spirits through her young man having gone for a soldier, and another who was just the reverse and would sing at her work and was always on the broad grin, but both good, hard-working girls, though the one was given to letting things slip out of her hand, and the other to banging.

I gave them both a good talking to before the Merediths came, and Jane (the one whose young man had gone for a soldier) began to cry and say perhaps she had better leave, which made me tell her not to be silly; and Mary, the merry one, laughed and said she'd try and be as quiet and miserable as she possibly could, but perhaps if I heard her begin singing on the stairs or anywhere where she could be heard I'd just call out, and she should remember and leave off.

When the family arrived with all the luggage you may be sure that I was very anxious to see what Mrs. Meredith was like. She was a short, stout lady of about fifty-five, with a weepy look on her face, and I knew directly, by the nervous way she got out of the cab and began to get excited over a black bag that her maid couldn't find for a moment, what I was in for. There was Mr. Meredith, Mrs. Meredith, and two young ladies, Miss Agatha and Miss Mildred. There were two sons, but they were married, and there were two other daughters, both married, as I

found out afterwards by their coming to see their mother.

The maid was quite a little bit of a thing—little and old, as Jarvis said afterwards—but a very matter - of - fact, self possessed little body, and evidently quite in the confidence of the family, and about the only one with any sense among them, and the way she answered her mistress showed me at once she understood who she had to deal with, and she knew how to take things coolly.

Deborah the maid's name was, and she hadn't been in the house long before we found out that Deborah was everybody and everything in the family, and that they would have been lost without her, as she managed everything, and knew where everything was, and calmed them all down when their nerves were wrong and they began a fuss. For they all fussed. A fussier family I never met with in all my days, and hope never to meet again. I'm sure sometimes after listening to the whole lot of them I've trembled like an aspen leaf, and said



to Deborah when she has come downstairs to her dinner or tea, which she always had with me and Jarvis, 'How you stand it I don't know.' But she used to say in her quiet way, 'Oh, you get used to it in time. It upset me at first, but now I don't take any notice of it.'

Mrs. Meredith didn't get up till nearly eleven, having her breakfast in bed, but she was always the first to begin fussing, sometimes ringing her bell violently at seven o'clock, and complaining that the servants made a noise going downstairs, and the first time Mary forgot and began to sing while she was scrubbing the hall she broke the bell-rope—she pulled it in such a state of excitement. We got at last to creep about the house for all the world as if we were going to a funeral, and Jane (whose young man had gone for a soldier) I found one morning trembling on the second floor landing and nearly in hysterics because she'd kicked against her dustpan, and she was afraid Mrs. Meredith would come rushing out in her nightgown and shake her, or something dreadful.

Mr. Meredith, he was fussy about his hot water, and his breakfast, and his tea, and if he wasn't called to the minute at eight ; and from the time he sat down to his breakfast at nine with his daughters to the time he left the house at ten, he was fussing about something or other, and the bother I had with his eggs and bacon nearly turned my hair gray. I never could get them both right, and the bacon nearly drove me mad. It was always 'raw,' or 'done to a cinder,' or too lean, or too fat, or something or other, and one day I said to Deborah, 'Upon my word, if he grumbles about the bacon any more I shall tell him to come down and cook it himself.' I'm sure I used to watch that bacon cooking as if it were a baby, and to the day he left it was never really right. And then there were his boots. I never heard a man grumble so about his boots in my life. We tried every kind of blacking, and Jarvis himself brushed away at them till he was black in the face himself, and the perspiration poured off him, but we never got them right. And he would stop on the mat as he was going out, and

growl out loud and say he believed we put dripping on them and let the cat lick it off, and other absurdities, till the sight of a pair of man's boots used to make me go cold all over, and I made Jarvis leave his off and go about in slippers all day to ease my mind.

The young ladies weren't quite so bad, but they were always worrying about family matters and their married sisters, and they used to write to these married sisters every day and have long letters back, and Deborah said they were exchanging their anxieties and 'fussing' by correspondence. And if their mamma went out by herself and was a few minutes late home to lunch or to tea, they used to begin to imagine accidents, and keep running to the front-door and looking up the street and saying their mamma had been run over or had a fit; and if *they* were late Mrs. Meredith used to walk about the room wringing her hands, and poor Deborah trying to calm her and telling her not to be silly, as they might be detained in a hundred ways; and one foggy night that Mr. Meredith

didn't come home for an hour after the dinner was on the table the whole family was in tears, and the two daughters were holding smelling-bottles to each other and to their ma, and they made up their minds that he had missed his way and fallen into the river, though how he was to have got into the river coming from Newgate-street to the West-end was more than I could understand; and when he did come home, having had to come by the underground railway and been detained in the tunnel, they all began to scold him as if he had committed a crime or tried to do them a mortal injury.

But the most terrible fuss was when one of them was a little ill. The whole family always imagined they were going to have some dreadful illness if only their little finger ached, and one day Miss Meredith was a little feverish, and had a sore throat, and that was enough. It was diphtheria. Oh, they were all quite sure of that, and our drains were wrong, or we hadn't boiled the drinking water, and when I happened to go upstairs and met Mrs.

Meredith coming out of her daughter's room, she turned to me suddenly and said :

‘I knew it—I knew you never boiled the water ; if my child dies you are a murderess.’

You might have knocked me down with a feather. It was the first time I had ever been called a murderess in my own house, and it is not the sort of thing any respectable married woman would put up with quietly ; and so, as soon as I got my breath, I spoke up and said that I would not be insulted like that, and begged they would find other apartments as soon as possible.

‘What!’ Mrs. Meredith screamed ; ‘you would turn my dying child out into the street?’

‘Dying fiddlesticks, madam,’ I said. ‘Miss Meredith’s got a cold, that’s all, and please don’t scream at me, because I won’t have it.’

Hearing words, Jarvis came upstairs and said, ‘Come away, Susan,’ and Deborah came out of her room and told Mrs. Meredith she was frightening Miss Mildred, and induced her to go away, and when I got downstairs I sank into a chair and said,

‘Murderess!—she called me a murderess!’ and I had hysterics so badly that Jarvis was frightened, and went out in the area till it was over, and Jane and Mary came and slapped my hands, and put vinegar on my head till I was calmer.

Mr. Meredith apologized the next morning and begged me not to take any notice; but his wife was always so terribly nervous when there was any illness in the family, and I agreed to think no more about it, but I said to Jarvis that if there was to be any more of that sort of thing, I’d go into apartments myself till Mrs. Meredith was gone.

The young lady very soon got better, for it was only a slight cold, and things went on fairly comfortable for a week, till one day that Mr. John, the eldest son, came to tea and told his mamma and sisters of a burglary that had been committed in his house, and how the thieves had actually come into his bedroom in the night and had taken his gold watch and his wife’s jewellery off the dressing-room table, and them fast asleep all the time, and knowing nothing about it until the

housemaid came up in the morning and said the breakfast-room French window at the back of the house was broken open, and the garden trampled about, and the silver salvers and things gone from the dining-room.

From that moment Mrs. Meredith and the young ladies began to fuss about burglars, and I dreaded the dark evenings, as they used to say such things, and I began to listen to every creak in the house at night myself, they got on my nerves so with their fussiness.

It seems that Mrs. Meredith had some very valuable jewellery, which she had in her dressing-bag, and which—wanting to wear it when she went out to dinner or to a ball, which they did occasionally—she would not put in the bank ; and she got it into her head that the burglars would come for it, and that blessed jewellery used to be hidden about of a night in the most extraordinary places for fear thieves should get it. One day she would wrap it up in paper and put it up the chimney, behind the register ; then she would think,

perhaps, that it wasn't safe there and would do it up into little parcels and put one in a hat-box, and another underneath the fender, and another in the coal-box in her bedroom, and another she would throw up on to the top of the bed canopy, and sometimes she would forget in the morning what she had done with some of it, and the whole family would be down on their knees feeling up the chimney, or crawling under the bed, or climbing up the steps to look on the canopy, or turning all the boxes and things upside down to look for a missing diamond-brooch ; and I used to say to Deborah that I wondered they didn't all go stark, staring mad.

And they insisted on our having bells put on all the shutters at night, which made me lie and tremble and say to Jarvis that if the bells went off in the night I should die, for really burglars were very much about at the time, and a poor woman in a house at the West-end had been dreadfully knocked about by housebreakers through waking up and going out to see what the noise on the stairs was, and there was a sort of general idea in



our house every evening, when we took our candlesticks, that we should all be murdered in our beds before morning, which was not the sort of thing to make life the blessing some people say it is.

The young ladies used to insist on my coming up and looking under their beds the last thing at night to see if a burglar was there, and then they would lock their door and nearly cause themselves internal injuries by moving the chest of drawers up against it, and Mrs. Meredith made Mr. Meredith buy two life-preservers, and gave one to Jarvis, and each kept one under his pillow, and she also bought two policemen's rattles, and gave one to Jarvis and told him to spring it out of window at the slightest noise he heard in the night. Of course the servants heard us talking, and Jane (the one whose young man had gone for a soldier) was afraid to go upstairs by herself after dark, and would utter piercing shrieks if the wind only made the window rattle at night after the house was quiet. I don't think there was a nerve left in the entire house, and my dresses began all to get too big for me, I was growing

so thin with the worry ; and many a time I said to Jarvis that if the Merediths didn't soon go he would find me one day a hopeless imbecile, twiddling my thumbs and staring into space, like I saw them once in a county asylum, where I was taken by a friend, who had a cousin an idiot through having fallen out of a swing-boat at a fair on to her head when quite a girl.

I knew it would end in something dreadful, and it did.

One night—it was November and a dense fog, and we had all gone to bed very miserable, there having been quite a series of burglaries in the papers that day and a policeman shot in a back-garden—I was fast asleep, when all of a sudden I woke with a start, and heard a loud crash downstairs, and at the same moment a shriek rang through the house.

Jarvis had heard it, and he jumped out of bed in a moment, and slipped on some things, and seized his life-preserver. ‘Oh, don't go!’ I screamed ;

‘it’s burglars and they’ll kill you,’ and my limbs trembled and my teeth chattered, and I felt as if I was going to die. But Jarvis said as the master of the house he must go and see what it was, so he crept out in the dark on tiptoe. Of course, as usual, there was not a single lucifer in the room just when one was wanted, and he peered over the banisters, and seeing nothing, he crept down to the lower floor to listen again. I was too frightened to know what I was doing, so I put my head under the clothes; but presently I heard the girls moving, so I got up and made a wild dash up into their room, and there they were all clutching hold of each other in their nightgowns, having heard the noise too.

For a minute all was quiet, and then there was a sound of footsteps, and a bang and voices, and then all the bells began to ring violently; the young ladies and Mrs. Meredith and Deborah and me all screamed together, and we could hear Mr. Meredith screaming downstairs. I put my head over the banisters and shouted, ‘Jarvis, Jarvis!’

for I was afraid some harm had come to him, but I was afraid to go down and get the police-rattle which was in our room ; but presently I heard one going, and I thought Mr. Meredith had opened his window to spring his, so in a minute or two when there was banging at the front door, I put my head out of the servants' window, which was in the front, and I saw the police and some people who were in the street, and they shouted, 'What is it?' and I said, 'Burglars in the house!' 'Come down and let us in, then,' said a policeman, but I didn't like to. But Mary, who was really a brave girl, said, 'I will.' And she darted down and opened the front door, and the police came in, and then we all had the courage to go a little lower down and listen.

The police came in, and Mary lit the gas in the hall and got a candle ; and I yelled for Jarvis, but couldn't make him answer, so I put on some things out of my room, and we all crept down together ; but the young ladies didn't open their door, they only kept groaning ; and Mrs. Meredith's door was locked, and she was evidently in hysterics by the

noise she made. I thought it was very cowardly of Mr. Meredith, being a man, not to come out, but I was too much upset to say anything, so I went on down towards the kitchen, trembling to think what might have happened to my poor Jarvis. We couldn't find any trace of anyone anywhere till we got down to the kitchen.

When we went into that with our candles, a dreadful sight met our eyes. My poor Jarvis was lying on his back quite senseless on the floor, his life-preserver still grasped in his hand, and beside him lay the prostrate form of a stalwart burglar quite motionless, only lying on his side with his back to us.

I had no eyes for anyone but my poor Jarvis. I sank down by his side in an agony of terror, and looked to see if he still breathed. What my thoughts then were Heaven knows! It was like a horrible dream. I thanked Heaven he breathed, and had evidently only been struck senseless by a blow from the man whom he had also managed to fell to the ground.

Suddenly one of the policemen said :

‘ This is odd. This here burglar ’s got his night-shirt on under his coat !’

‘ What ?’ I said ; and then the girls, who had been too frightened to look at a burglar, and were cowering in a corner, being not much dressed, looked, and Mary said : ‘ Oh lor, mum ! why it’s Mr. Meredith.’

‘ Who’s he ?’ asked the policeman.

‘ Why, the gentleman on the first floor,’ said Mary.

At that moment cook, who was looking about, said :

‘ Oh, ma’am ! I see what made the noise.’

There, on the mantelshelf, was our black Tom, glaring at us, evidently wondering what we were doing in the kitchen at that time of night, and lying on the hearth was the clock which used to stand on the shelf. That imp of mischief had jumped up and knocked it over with a crash, and it was that which had alarmed us.

I saw it all while the girls were getting cold

water and vinegar, and bringing Jarvis and Mr. Meredith to. They had both gone downstairs with their life-preservers, and, Mr. Meredith being in the kitchen first, Jarvis had come on him suddenly, and they had both mistaken each other for burglars, and hammered away at each other with the life-preservers, and struck each other senseless.

When we got them round the policemen examined them and said they didn't think they were much injured, and that wretched Mary burst out laughing hysterically when Mr. Meredith and Jarvis both got better, and sat up and glared at each other.

We got them up and put them in two chairs, and gave them brandy, but it was some time before they could quite understand what had happened; and I'm sure both their heads were very sore, though, fortunately, no more mischief was done.

I went up to Mrs. Meredith and knocked at her door, and she shrieked.

'Oh, please don't do that, ma'am,' I said. 'It's all right. It wasn't a burglar; it was a cat.'

‘A cat!’ she said; ‘then why doesn’t my husband come back to bed, leaving me here half dead with fright?’

I explained to her what had happened, and then she opened the door, and I do believe that if I hadn’t given her a look that meant something she would have gone on at me and made out that it was all my fault. But just then Mary and a policeman brought Mr. Meredith up, groaning, between them, and we got them into the room, leaving the policeman outside, as Mrs. Meredith was only in her nightgown, and I saw he was all right, only a bit dazed, and he hoped he hadn’t hurt Jarvis; and then I wished them good-night, and went and helped the other policeman to bring Jarvis up. He was what he called a little bit groggy on his legs, but I felt his head all over, and though there was a lump there was nothing broken and no blood; and we got him up to the bedroom and he managed to get into bed, and then I got some money to give to the policemen, and they went outside and cleared quite a mob away that had gathered round, and



the neighbours, I heard afterwards, had their heads out of window, and altogether it was a nice scene, and I felt in a rage with myself for ever letting Mrs. Meredith make me as nervous as herself and get burglars on the brain.

The next morning Mr. Meredith was very kind, and took Jarvis with him to his doctor, and they both had their heads examined. There was no mischief done, though both felt aching, and they were rather weak <sup>on</sup> the legs. They got all right very soon, but I shall remember that night as long as I live.

Very soon after that the Merediths left, and I said to Jarvis, if it wasn't for the smoke annoying the neighbours we'd have a bonfire in the back garden. And I never want fussy people in my house again, seeing how very nearly my husband and Mr. Meredith came to killing each other through mistaking each other for burglars, which they would never have done but for the way Mrs. Meredith and the young ladies had worked everybody's nerves up, till really we should have jumped

out of our skin if a cat had come upstairs after dark. As it was, it was a cat that did it all.

Jarvis always declared to his dying day that he could feel the place on his head where Mr. Meredith had hit him with the life-preserver, but I think that was all fancy. But we threw ours and the rattle into the dustbin the very next day, and I never let Jarvis go downstairs again at night without a candle, to the day he died. And, what's more, I never went to bed without seeing that there were plenty of matches in the room. And a very wise precaution it is, as every housewife knows for herself, and I learnt by bitter experience.

## V.

### ‘*RATS.*’

I HAD always made up my mind that we would never allow dogs, though nobody is fonder of animals than I am; but dogs in apartments I knew, by poor mother’s experience, always lead to trouble, however well they are looked after, even if all your lodgers are agreeable to one about the place, and there is generally somebody who objects.

But when Mr. Simpson came to us he pleaded so hard to be allowed to bring his little black-and-tan terrier with him, saying it was his only companion and all he had in the world, that I couldn’t refuse him, especially as he was taking our dining-room floor, which is not like having a dog running up and down stairs. I was firm for a long time, saying

that if I had known he wanted a dog with him, I should have told him at once when he took the rooms that we never allowed it. But he said that his dog Rats (that was its name) never barked, and sat with him all day long quite quietly, just like a Christian, and nobody would know there was one in the house, and so at last I consented to give it a trial. But I gave Mr. Simpson distinctly to understand that if anyone in the house complained I should have, of course, to give him notice, and on that condition I let him have the dog with him.

It really was a dear little thing, and quite deserved the good character its master gave it. And it wasn't always getting into the hall, and running out whenever the door was opened, like the little dog that a lady had, an American, who had apartments once in my poor mother's house, and nearly drove her raving mad, getting so on her mind that she was always expecting the servants to say, 'Oh, ma'am, Fido's lost again.'

The lady had brought the dog with her all the way from America, and made as much fuss about

it as if it were a child, and was always saying that if it were lost she should go out of her mind ; and there never was such a dog for slipping out, and nobody knowing anything about it or seeing it go. Half the servants' time was taken up in running up and down the street looking for Fido, and its mistress would stand at the front door wringing her hands, and going on like a maniac till it was found. Whenever the lady went out anywhere of an evening where she couldn't take Fido we used to lock the little wretch in, and though it used to howl till we had to put our fingers in our ears, we wouldn't let it out, because one evening that we did it came downstairs and sat with us, and when nobody was looking got out at the area door, which was open, and up the area steps, and squeezed itself through the railings and disappeared ; and there we were, when its mistress came home, running about in the dark street calling it, and peering down the other areas, and asking the policeman and everybody we met if they'd seen a Skye terrier dog that answered to the name of Fido. The American lady was in hysterics

all the time ; and mother, who was a most religious woman, went so far as to say that if the dog that went into the Ark had only slipped out and never been heard of again, it would have been a great load off her mind at the present moment.

We found the little wretch after all, all covered with mud and curled up shivering, on a doorstep two streets off ; but it got lost several times after that, the last being the very day that its mistress was going back to New York, and all her luggage on the cab, and late starting owing to her declaring that she had lost a valuable brooch, and unlocking her big trunk and searching right to the bottom to see if she had left it on a dress, which she had ; and when everything was ready, if that imp of a Fido hadn't slipped out as usual, and not a trace of him was to be seen high or low.

The cabman said to the lady, ' Now, ma'am, if I'm to get to Euston in time I must start, as my horse isn't over fast ;' but she couldn't go away to America and leave Fido lost in England. And it was a nice scene, a crowd of butchers' boys and

that kind of people collecting, through the way she carried on, and all of them running about looking for that little fiend, through her saying that she'd give a sovereign to anyone that found him; and presently two boys came back with him, he howling and snapping through the way they tugged at him, fighting which should have him for the reward; and then she seized him and dragged him into the cab, and the cabman whipped up his horse and galloped off, she flinging the sovereign out of the window, and a great hulking fellow of a man, who'd never moved to look for the dog, picking it up and walking off with it, leaving the two boys using dreadful language at mother on the front-door step, till she banged the door to, and said she'd never have another dog inside her house as long as her name was what it was.

It was Fido that I remembered when Mr. Simpson told me that he had a little dog and wanted to have it with him.

He was a very odd man was Mr. Simpson, and it was a long time before we could quite make him

out. He was about forty, and wore his hair rather long, and smoked a pipe all day, and read for hours together in an easy chair with Rats on his lap, and talked the oddest nonsense to me and the servants, when any of us would stop in the room and listen to him; but he was quite respectable as far as his references went, and always paid to the minute, and without ever grumbling, and didn't seem to care what he had for dinner. I thought at first he wasn't quite right in his head, till we got to know that it was only his way; and the first time I happened to be outside and heard him talking to his dog, I went down and said to Jarvis that I wasn't at all easy in my mind about him. 'You never are about anybody, my dear,' was the answer I got, which made me cross, because, after all, you can't be too careful whom you take under your roof, with a good connection and the reputation of your house in the neighbourhood to be considered.

'Well,' I said, feeling indignant, for Jarvis himself had begun to be rather trying about that time, 'I don't care what you say; it is not right for a



man to sit by himself and talk to his dog. The only man I ever saw do that was in one of Shakespeare's plays in the theatre, and he was a fool, and dressed like one, which was a sensible habit they had in those days, instead of letting fools go about dressed like anybody else as they do to-day, so that you can't tell them when you see them.'

Then Jarvis asked me what I'd heard Mr. Simpson saying to his dog, and I told him he'd said, 'Rats, old fellow, I wish I could find something in life to make me wag my tail like you do yours.' The idea of a man of forty wanting to do such a thing, which, after all, wasn't possible, however happy he'd been.

Jarvis laughed. 'Oh, I know what's the matter with him,' he said. 'He's a philosopher, and he's talking metaphorically.'

'Oh, is he?' I said, tossing my head. 'Then, all I can say is that it's a very silly language, and I don't want to hear any more of it.'

But I had to hear a lot more of it, and grew to think nothing of it in time, and to understand Mr.

Simpson better, though to the day he left I didn't get over the awful habit he had of reading in bed, with the candle on the chest of drawers, half the night, which I knew through seeing the candlestick there in the morning, and the book thrown on the floor ; and he confessed that he always did that, flinging the book away and blowing out the candle just as he felt going off to sleep. I told him it frightened me, and I was sure we should all be burnt in our beds, but he said he'd done it for years, and never had an accident ; and I said that people couldn't be burnt to death more than once, so that was nothing to go by.

His dog always lay at night curled up at the foot of his bed, and when the servant used to take him his cup of tea in the morning and the newspaper, she told me that while she was dusting the front room she could hear Mr. Simpson reading bits of the paper out to the dog, and talking to him about what had happened just as if he had been a Christian.

'Fancy that !' I said to Jarvis ; ' he reads the

paper to the dog, and talks politics to it. Is that being a philosopher ?

‘I’m not sure it isn’t,’ said Jarvis. ‘I’d rather anybody talk politics to their dog than to me. I hate ’em !’

Which he did, poor man, to his dying day ; and I think it was through our taxes being so heavy, no matter what Government was in power, and his having been struck once with a bad egg, thrown at a gentleman he was valet to many years before, who was a candidate at a general election.

Mr. Simpson had been with us quite a month before we found out what was really the matter with him, and then we knew through his talking to me more than usual, when I went in one day to ask him what he would like for dinner. He was sitting in the easy chair with his pipe in his mouth, and Rats on his lap as usual, and he seemed lost in thought, so I had to ask him twice before he answered.

‘What would you like for dinner to-night, sir ?’  
I said.

He looked up at me for a minute, staring hard at me without speaking, and then he said :

‘ Oh, I don’t know. I think I’ll have some arsenic soup and a boiled bombshell.’

‘ Lor’, sir !’ I said, ‘ whatever do you mean ?’

‘ Oh, I don’t know ; I’m sick of life. If it wasn’t for Rats I’d go and throw myself into the crater of Mount Vesuvius ; but I’d have to take Rats with me, and he’s not tired of life yet, are you, Rats, old chap ?’

The little dog put his paws up on his master’s shoulders and licked his cheek.

‘ Poor old Rats ! he loves me, if nobody else does. Oh, dear me, Mrs. Jarvis, are you happy ?’

‘ Well, sir, yes ; as happy as Jarvis and the drawing-rooms will let me be.’

‘ What’s the matter with the drawing-rooms ?’

‘ Oh, they give such a lot of trouble, and the servants complain about them. The bell’s going all day long, and they’ve so many visitors it’s one girl’s work to answer the door, and they’re always having company to dinner ; and now, if you please,

they're going to have a musical evening, with coffee and sandwiches for twenty ; and look at the work it makes, not to mention the noise.'

'Company, eh ? A lot of company. Ah, I suppose you don't care for it. Well, I'm some compensation. I never have anybody to see me.'

'No, that's true, sir ; and I often think it must be very lonely for you.'

'Lonely ?' he said, getting up out of his chair, and beginning to walk up and down the room ; 'do you know, sometimes, if it wasn't for Rats here, I should go out and buy a sixpenny skipping-rope and hang myself by it to the hall-lamp ?'

'Dear, dear !' I said, feeling quite uncomfortable, 'you mustn't talk like that. Surely you have some friends.'

'No, none, I had once, but they're all gone.'

'Dead ?' I said.

'No ; but I've worn them all out. Everybody gets to hate me in time. You'll hate me before long. Rats is the only being in the world that will never hate me.'

'Dear, dear!' I said, 'you mustn't go on like that. I shall begin to think you've done something dreadful.'

'So I have!' he exclaimed, so fiercely that Rats jumped off his knee, and slunk under the table. 'So I have, and it haunts me—it haunts me night and day.'

He got up and began to stride to and fro up and down the room in a way that made me edge near the door.

'I've been a beast,' he said, at the top of his voice—'a selfish beast! I broke a woman's heart. God help me! I didn't know what I was doing, I didn't know what I was doing!'

I felt dreadfully uncomfortable, you may be sure, standing there and listening to him. It was so awkward not knowing what to say, or whether to go out and leave him, or what. I couldn't say, 'Oh, sir, I'm sure you didn't mean it!' or 'Perhaps it will be all right by-and-by,' or any of the things one generally says to comfort people, because I really didn't know what he meant exactly.

But I didn't have to say anything, because, after muttering to himself for a second or two, he went on again.

'I dare say you think me odd,' he said—'mad, perhaps, but I can't always keep my troubles to myself. I sit here day after day, and night after night, eating my heart out, and I only tell Rats my troubles ; but it's no good telling him what a villain I've been. He won't believe it. If I were to tell him I'd committed a murder he'd just wag his tail and lick my hand, and think I was the finest fellow in the world ; but you—you are a woman, and you'll understand.'

'Yes, sir,' I said quietly, though I thought it wasn't necessary of him to tell me that I could understand things better than his dog.

'You mustn't mind me going on a bit to-day ; I can't help it. It's this day twelve months ago that it all happened. A year ago I had a wife ; a year ago to-day I saw her for the last time. It was all my fault. I was selfish. I forgot that women have hearts, and can feel. I was so wrapped up in

myself and my work—I'm a writer; one of the vain, egotistical idiots who dream that what they think and imagine is interesting to the world, you know—and I thought only of my work, and let my poor girl drift out of my life. I was cold to her—ill-tempered, savage, when she took me away from my own thoughts, from my own pursuits. I didn't notice how it was telling on her; I didn't notice the pained look on her face, the love-hunger in her eyes. I never thought that the breach between us was growing wider day by day, that all the colour was fading out of her life, and that love was being killed by the hoar-frost of neglect. One day—it was a year ago to-day—she came to me in my study where I was at work. She put her arm round my neck. I was ill-tempered, irritable, out of sorts. I had broken down for a time over the book I was writing, I knew what I wanted to do; but I couldn't do it—that is, not well; the idea would not come out as I wanted it to. Suddenly all seemed growing clear. The difficulty was vanishing as I sat at my desk, and it was at that



moment my poor girl came and put her arm round me, and said softly, "Jack!" God knows what made me do it, but her action had disturbed my train of thought. "Curse it! why can't you leave me alone?" I cried, and, with a petulant action, I put up my elbow to push her away. She was nearer than I thought; my elbow struck her—struck her hard on the breast, and made her spring back with a cry of pain.

'She went out of the room quickly. Even then I was so mad that I didn't see what a brute I had been. I was sorry I had hurt her; it was an accident, but my idea had gone. In a fit of rage I picked up my unfinished manuscript and hurled it into the fire—I flung leaf upon leaf until a great blaze roared up the chimney. Then I had realized what I had done—destroyed the labour of months. I felt like a madman, mad with myself—mad with everybody else! I rushed out into the hall, took my hat, and went out into the street. I walked fast and furiously, God knows where to—I never knew. I noticed nothing; only I clenched

my fists, and muttered to myself, and the people who passed me stared at me and thought I was a lunatic. And I *was* one then !

‘ Suddenly my passion spent itself, and I remembered what I had done to my wife. I went back home ; I went into the sitting-room—she was not there ! I asked the servants ; they told me the mistress had gone out. She had left a note for me in my study.

‘ I went into the study. The note was lying on the table. I opened the envelope, and read the few lines she had written. “ I will not be a burthen and a trouble to you, dear, any more,” she said ; “ I should not have come to you to worry you this morning, but it was my birthday, and you had forgotten it.”

‘ Her birthday—and I had forgotten it ! And when she had come to me to put her arms round my neck, I had repulsed her with a blow, and she had gone ; and—and she wouldn’t trouble me any more.

‘ I searched everywhere for her. She had very

few friends in London—only a married sister, and two old schoolfellows whom she visited. I went to her sister first: Letty—that was my wife's name—had been there, she had stayed only a short time, and had left just before I came. She had told her sister that she was leaving me, that she was in my way, that she interrupted my work, and she felt I had ceased to care for her. She had told her sister not to grieve about her or to be anxious; she knew what she was going to do, and she knew where she was going—she would write to her from time to time.

‘For a moment I was jealous. God knows what put the wicked idea into my head, but I banished it directly it came. I knew that I had crushed her spirit, broken her brave little heart, and that she had gone out into the world without me.

‘I advertised, under initials, in the papers for her, imploring her to return. I made every search for her, but in vain. I was like a man beside myself. My only friend was Rats—Rats, who had

been our little dog ever since we were married and who loved us both. Rats looked for his lost mistress as well as I did. He knew I wanted to find her. He would go to the front door of a morning and look up and down the street, and go to the top, and peer round the corner. I knew that, like myself, he was watching for the loved one who never came.

‘A fortnight after her disappearance a letter came from her. It was only a short, kind little note. I was not to worry about her but to get on with my work. She would never trouble me again.

‘And then I heard no more. The home became unbearable to me. I couldn’t work ; I was like a man in a dream. At last I gave up in despair. I knew that we were separated for ever, and I sold up the home, took poor old Rats with me, and came here, and it’s a year to-day since it all happened.’

It was a dreadful story, and the tears came into my eyes as Mr. Simpson told it me. Poor fellow ! I understood all his queer ways now, and why he

sat and talked to himself and the dog, but I wouldn't say anything except that it was very sad, and I was very sorry, and just then Jarvis called me, and I went downstairs, and I was rather glad to get away, for I felt thoroughly miserable looking at that poor fellow, and seeing the misery and despair in his face.

It was about the drawing-rooms that Jarvis wanted to see me. They'd sent down to say there would be twenty-five to their musical party that evening, and would we let them have chairs out of the other rooms? That was a nice idea, and it made me lose my temper, but Jarvis said it was no good being disagreeable, and so I said of course he never would be master in his own house, and gave way, though they were that mean, and grumbled at every item in the bill so much that I didn't at all see moving chairs out of the other rooms for them. Furniture gets damaged in furnished apartments quite enough without being moved about, and your chairs are banged together against the walls, rubbing the polish, to say nothing of a lot of

musical people, and one of them I knew, a German with long hair, who took more out of our poor piano in one night than all the other people who had used it had ever done in five years, and then had the impudence to say it ought to be broken up for firewood, which certainly he did his best to do by the positively brutal way he smashed the notes, just for all the world, as our housemaid said, as if he was breaking stones with a hammer. The only wonder to me was that he didn't send the piano through the floor, and the way the chandelier down below jumped quite put my heart in my mouth, and I said to Jarvis, 'If there's much more of this turn the gas off at the meter, and send up candles—it isn't safe.'

I shall never forget the party that night, because of what happened while it was on. Mr. Simpson went out because he was low-spirited and couldn't stand the music. He said the violin always made him want to cut his throat when he was miserable, and he left Rats at home. The door was being opened and shut all the evening, people coming

and going, and when Mr. Simpson came home about midnight, and went into his room, in a minute he came out and called down to us 'Is Rats with you?' My heart was in my mouth in a moment, and Fido came back to me as if it were yesterday, 'Lor, no, sir!' I gasped, 'isn't he there?'

'No,' he said, his voice trembling. 'Where can he be?' We hunted the house high and low, I feeling as if I could drop, but no Rats was to be seen. I guessed what it was; he'd got out when the door was opened, the servant often letting him out for a run when Mr. Simpson was out, but I suppose, with the people coming and going, she hadn't noticed he hadn't come in again.

Rats was lost!

I don't know what I said or did, but I went downstairs and felt hysterical. I knew what Mr. Simpson would be like, poor fellow, and on that day, too; all he cared for in the world was gone if Rats wasn't found. I heard him going on like a madman upstairs, and presently I heard him

outside whistling and shouting, 'Rats, Rats !' and his voice grew fainter and fainter as he went up the street.

He came back in an hour as pale as death. There was no sign of the dog anywhere. He never went to bed that night. He kept going to the door and opening it, and peering out into the darkness, and crying: 'Rats, Rats !' for I couldn't sleep a wink for thinking of it, and left our door open and could hear him.

When I came downstairs in the morning he was dressed and sitting in the chair with his eyes red and swollen and a fierce look on his face. I won't say what he said—it was blasphemous, but the man was beside himself.

He didn't touch his breakfast, but just drank a cup of tea and went out. He said he'd search London but he'd find his little dog again, and I'm sure I prayed from the bottom of my heart that he might.

About one o'clock I was in the kitchen when I gave a start, and seized the cook by the arm in



a way that made her jump and drop a plate—of course one of the best service—it always is when anything's broken.

‘Hark!’ I said.

It was the short, sharp bark of a dog on the doorstep.

I rushed upstairs and opened the door, and there was Rats. I picked him up, and hugged him as if he'd been a lost child. As soon as he got in the room he sniffed about everywhere in a most excited way, looking for his master.

His master came in about three, utterly broken down; but the moment he saw Rats he gave a cry of joy and picked him up and hugged him just as I'd done myself. And for the life of me I couldn't help the tears running down my cheeks when I saw it.

But the dog wouldn't stop in his arms. It licked his face and jumped down and ran to the door and twisted round and barked, and said, as plain as human language, ‘Come with me.’

Mr. Simpson stared at the dog, and then he went

and opened the door. The dog ran out wild with joy, and barked, and as good as asked him to come along; and Mr. Simpson, wondering what was the matter with the dog, went.

That evening, about eight o'clock, he came back, but without the dog.

Directly he got in the hall he shouted out for me, and I rushed upstairs. I never saw a man so changed in my life.

'I've found her!' he cried out, 'I've found her!'

'Your wife, sir?' I said.

'Yes; Rats found her. She passed this very door last night while he was out, and he followed her and barked, and presently she noticed him, and knew him; and not liking to leave him, not knowing where he'd come from, she picked him up and took him home with her, and kept him all night, but directly the door was opened he got out, and somehow found his way back, for it's miles from here where my poor girl lives, and he'd just come after me to take me to her, and that's what he meant.'

‘Why, it’s like a Christian!’ I said, ‘but I’m so glad—ah, you can’t tell how glad I am you’ve found her. And is it to be all right?’

‘Yes, yes; all right. She’s forgiven me everything, and we shall never quarrel again.’ A shade passed over his face. ‘Poor girl!’ he said; ‘she had a bad time, that blow of mine. But, God bless her, I’ll love and cherish her now for ever.’

I was a woman, and I knew what he meant.

‘She was ill for months,’ he said. ‘Ill and weak, and in the hospital; but they saved her life, and now she’s well again, and she’ll soon be strong. But she was working, fancy that, working with her clever little fingers at bonnets and things for a living. But it’s all right now, and to-morrow—to-morrow, Mrs. Jarvis, I’ll bring her back here, my wife, my own dear little wife again.’

‘And Rats, sir,’ I said, ‘where’s he?’

‘Rats? I’ve left him to take care of her. I told you he was the best friend I ever had except Letty, and he’s brought us together again after all. God bless him!’

They stayed with us for a month, Mr. Simpson and his wife—oh, how pale and how sweet she was!—and Rats. And then they went away and took a house of their own again, and six months afterwards Mr. Simpson sent me his new book which he'd finished, and when I looked on the front page I found that it was dedicated to 'My dear Wife—and Rats.'

I expect that bothered a lot of people—looking so odd; but I knew what it meant, and to this day I never see a little black-and-tan dog without thinking of the time when Mr. Simpson had our dining-rooms, and sat alone all day talking to his 'dear old Rats.'

## VI.

### *THE THIRD-FLOOR MYSTERY.*

WE always called him 'The Mystery' for years afterwards, in speaking of him, because that was the name we gave him at the time he was with us. He came with excellent references, and every appearance of respectability, being about fifty years old, with dark hair turning gray, a military walk, a clean-shaven face, and a pair of gray eyes that had a mischievous twinkle in them.

He came to us about ten days after a Mrs. Vernon Cobbett had taken our drawing-rooms with her child and nurse, a room on the third floor being taken for the nurse and made into a sort of nursery for her and the baby, and it was the next room to the one occupied by the 'Mystery.'

We told him when he came that he would have a child next to him, and that it cried a good deal, which, of course, we couldn't help, it being only natural; and he said it didn't matter a bit, as he would be out a good deal in the daytime, and he slept so soundly at night that the Woolwich infant wouldn't wake him, much less Mrs. Vernon Cobbett's baby.

Mrs. Vernon Cobbett was a tall, fair lady, whose age I put down at anything between thirty and forty. She came one day in a hansom cab and asked if we had apartments vacant, and I showed her over our drawing-rooms, and she said they would do, and explained she should want a room upstairs for her nurse and child; and after seeing over the place we came to terms, and she gave me the name of her solicitor as a reference, and said she should come in next week, which she did, and I am never likely to forget her, for she was just the kind of woman to impress herself upon the memory of everybody who had anything to do with her.

I didn't mind her being particular about the

child—of course a mother has a mother's feelings, and it is only natural a mother should be anxious when there is a baby in the case, but it was everything the same. Nothing was ever right: everything was always wrong. There was a draught, and that was death to the child; the chimney smoked, and that was death to the child; the people going up and down stairs made a noise and woke the child, and that was death to it, though why it should be I don't know, for according to Mrs. Vernon Cobbett—if we didn't give her her middle name she was always furious—baby always happened to be asleep when there was a noise in the house. As to the draught in the drawing-room, I'm sure she nearly drove us mad over it, and Jarvis was fixing indiarubber to the doors and sandbags to the windows, and tinkering about to try and stop up every crevice of them all day long; and to the day she left, though we went to fearful expense in screens and curtains over the door, and that sort of thing, she always declared that there was draught enough to turn a windmill.

And the gas she used was something dreadful, keeping it turned on full for hours, and the doors shut to, saying she was cold, until sometimes, when I went to open the door and go in, I used to turn quite faint, and feel for all the world as if I was in a furnace, to say nothing of the way it blackens the ceilings, which had been fresh whitewashed before she came in, and began to look as bad as ever again before she'd been with us a month.

But I didn't say much to her, for, to tell the truth, I was rather afraid of her, for she had a terrible tongue, what Jarvis called a malignant tongue—and after hearing what she would say about other people, and the nurse having given me a hint to be careful what I said to her, as she was a mischief-maker, I thought to myself that so far as I was concerned the least said the soonest mended. I knew she was quite capable of going away and saying the most dreadful things about our house; and as you don't hear what's said about you very often unless it comes out accidentally, that sort of thing does a lot of harm, and you



can't guard against it, or even have an opportunity of explaining that it is a pack of lies.

I remembered how dear mother suffered through once having given a lady notice to leave through not liking her having a gentleman visitor there so late; often mother sitting up herself as late as one a.m. to let him out—which, seeing that madam's husband was in India, was hardly the thing, though there might have been no harm in it; still, you cannot be too careful when you let apartments, the character of a house being so easily ruined. It was after this lady left that mother remained unlet for a long time, and only found it out quite by accident that madam had put it about everywhere she had had to leave through losing so many things, even money having disappeared, and things taken out of the chest of drawers and wardrobe while she was out.

How these things get known about is a mystery, because you'd think only a few people at most would hear it, but in some extraordinary way it goes sufficiently to affect your business.

Directly I heard what a malignant tongue Mrs. Vernon Cobbett had I said to Jarvis, 'Whatever she does I'm not going to make an enemy of her. It will be better to stand her as long as we can, and then find a clever way of making her give us notice herself.'

What turned me against her first was the dreadful things she said about her husband, Mr. Vernon Cobbett, whom she said she had left owing to his bad conduct; and he, being a well-known novelist—of course, I haven't used the right names—and a man very much written and talked about, and, as I had always heard, respected, I thought it was very dreadful that his own wife should talk about him in such a way to me, she having a perfect right to think that I was like a good many landladies, and a gossip, and likely to repeat what she told me to my neighbours, and the people who came to the house. But I never breathed a word, never having been a scandalmonger, but considering what I knew or found out about the ladies and gentlemen who took my apartments as no business of anybody's.

The nurse, who was a very nice girl and from the country, used to tell us a good deal downstairs, and it seems it was quite true Mrs. Vernon Cobbett had left her husband, having had the carriage ordered one day after lunch and driven away with her boxes and the nurse and the baby, and gone to the seaside, and then moved about from place to place till she came to us; but nothing had been seen of Mr. Cobbett and no letters from him received, because if they had been nurse must have known it, she always seeing the letters on the breakfast table before her mistress got up, and knowing 'the master's' handwriting, which was a big, bold one, and very easily recognised.

Of course Mrs. Vernon Cobbett, in explaining to me that she was the wife of the well-known gentleman of that name, would naturally make out that the reason she lived apart from him and he never came to see her or her child, which was now about three years old, was because she did not choose to allow him to; but she need not have gone out of her way to make him appear such a villain to me—

a perfect stranger. When I told Jarvis what she had said about her husband he was indignant, and said, whatever the truth might be, it was scandalous of a woman to go putting such things about, and he said that Mr. Vernon Cobbett was to be congratulated on not having such a woman about him, whatever his faults might be; and though I know men are sometimes very bad, and don't treat women as they ought to, yet certainly I haven't any sympathy with a woman who could talk as she did about her husband and the father of her child.

Nurse said he was a very nice man, though hasty tempered, and given to high words, as she knew, from having sometimes gone into the room to fetch the baby when her master and mistress were quarrelling, and seeing him walking up and down with his nails dug into his hands and his face twitching; and she sitting with an insolent sneer on her face that, as nurse said, was enough to make any man forget himself and throw something at her head—not that Mr. Vernon Cobbett ever did that; he relieving his feelings generally

by putting on his hat and going out and banging the door behind him in a way that made the house rock as if there had been an earthquake underneath it, and sometimes bringing things down off the mantelshelf with a crash.

And if she said to his face what she said behind his back, I don't wonder at it. If I had been a man I should have banged her head instead of the door.

It was after she had been with us about a fortnight that we first began to notice the extraordinary proceedings of the gentleman on the third floor, and to call him 'the Mystery.' It was Jarvis who noticed him first. Going out one day, he happened to look up to see the effect of some new flower-boxes we had had put up, and he saw Mr. Greenslade leaning out of window smoking a pipe, which is not what we cared to see in our house—not thinking it looked well. A pipe out of window means generally young men lodgers or cheap rooms, and it is not usual in high-class houses. Of course, it wasn't that which made us think him a

mystery, but that night Jarvis happened to go out again, and he went across the road and stopped there for a minute, suddenly remembering that there was something he wanted to get that evening, and he had quite forgotten what it was. And while he was in the shadow opposite he saw nurse come out with a letter in her hand to go to post with, and immediately after out came Mr. Greenslade, who walked after the nurse, and in passing knocked up against her so violently he knocked the letter out of her hand on to the pavement. He picked it up, took off his hat, and apologized and went on; but what bothered Jarvis was that from where he stood he could see that Mr. Greenslade did not knock up against nurse by accident, as, of course, he pretended to her he did, but that he walked on quickly after her with the intention of doing it.

When he told me about it I said that it was curious, but perhaps he did it to get into conversation with the girl, and make it an excuse for talking to her, that sort of thing often happening to young women, as I have been annoyed myself with im-

pudent men doing things of the same sort, and begging your pardon, etc., though I always cut them short, saying, 'It's granted,' and walk on; and I determined to talk to nurse and warn her not to encourage the man, if he should try to get into conversation with her in the house, which I did; but it didn't have much effect, though I thought she went rather red at the time, and so I was not surprised one day when I went upstairs quietly, to find them talking together on the landing. Of course, it really was no business of mine, and I didn't care to say anything to Mrs. Vernon Cobbett, knowing what a malignant-minded woman she was, but I spoke out plainly to nurse that evening, and she said that it was nonsense—that Mr. Greenslade only just passed the time of day, knowing friends of hers in the place she came from, which was somewhere in Kent.

I told Jarvis he ought to speak to Mr. Greenslade about it, and tell him we didn't like it, but he said he couldn't, as it would look so rude; because, after all, what was there in a man of that age and

thoroughly respectable just speaking to the nurse on the landing, and we should have a job to let his room if he left, for there weren't many people who would come and live on the same floor as a crying baby

Another thing that worried me was this: Two days after that affair of the knocking up against nurse I was coming downstairs about five minutes to eight, and saw the front door open and Mr. Greenslade, in his slippers, standing looking out of it, and smoking that wretched pipe of his again.

'Good-morning, Mrs. Jarvis,' he said. 'I've had a bad night, and I'm getting a breath of early morning fresh air to give me an appetite for my breakfast.'

I thought a pipe before breakfast wasn't much of an appetite-maker, but didn't say so; but I felt very annoyed both at the slippers and the pipe, not considering either of them respectable in a first-class house like ours, where many members of the aristocracy, so to speak, had stayed, and we hoped to have the same again, so I shrugged my shoulders



and went on downstairs, and in about ten minutes I heard the door bang, and he came to the top of the stairs and said :

‘ Here are the letters, Mrs. Jarvis. I was standing at the door, and the postman gave them to me.’

I went up, and he handed me two letters for Jarvis and one for Mrs. Vernon Cobbett. It was a letter in a blue envelope, and, quite accidentally, I noticed that it was from a firm of solicitors in the country, their name being stamped on the back of it, as usual, I believe, with business envelopes.

Then he went upstairs to his own room whistling, which was another objectionable habit of his, and I had to speak about it to him one Sunday, we having a very religious old lady at the time in the dining-rooms, who was horrified at it, and said to me it was blasphemous to hear a comic song being whistled in the most brazen manner inside a Christian household on the Sabbath morning. I told him the lady had complained, and he said he was very sorry, and in future on Sundays he would

always whistle a hymn or something from the oratorios.

We shouldn't, perhaps, have thought so much of these things but for what happened later on. An elderly woman named Grayling was in the habit of coming pretty often to see Mrs. Vernon Cobbett, and nurse told me she was an old servant of Mrs. Vernon Cobbett's family, and had often been to see her when she was living with Mr. Vernon Cobbett; and one day, as she was leaving, Mr. Greenslade came downstairs quickly, nearly knocking Mary, the housemaid, who was taking up the stair carpet, down, and went out in a hurry; and I happening to go to the front door at the time, I saw him up at the top of the street speak to a man in a billycock hat who was slouching about there and then jump into a hansom, and the man in the billycock hat walked off sharp, turning round the corner that Mrs. Grayling had gone round, and I went downstairs to Jarvis and said, 'Jarvis, there's something going on in this house that I don't understand;' and I told him what I'd

seen, and he said, ‘ Susan, I’ve got the key to the mystery—this man Greenslade is one of these private inquiry fellows, and Mrs. Vernon Cobbett is being watched, and her affairs pried into.’

The moment Jarvis said that I felt that he was right, and it made me very uncomfortable. I had visions of all manner of dreadful things, and our house mixed up in a scandal, which was always in my mind, as I have told you before, having a horror of such things—dear mother having particularly warned me against them, and I always remembered her words long after she had been laid to her rest, poor dear, dying through a cold caught sitting up in the kitchen and falling asleep, and letting the fire out through her consideration for the servants, letting them go to bed, and one of the lodgers being gone to a ball and no latchkey, her careless cook having lost hers in the street ; and the lock not being altered, she naturally insisted on the chain being put up and the door bolted till it was, as anyone might have picked up the key and let himself in in the night, and robbed the house and

gone away and nobody any the wiser; and a whole chapter might be written on lost latchkeys and latchkeys taken away by people, and what people who let furnished apartments suffer from that sort of thing nobody would believe, while a latchkey is lost, your heart being in your mouth at every sound you hear at night until the door is bolted up, not knowing at any moment what may happen.

When Jarvis and I had made up our minds that we had discovered what the third-floor mystery really was, we were both in a state; but on thinking it out Jarvis said after all it was probably the husband doing it, perhaps suspecting his wife or wanting to know what she was doing. But up to now we need not be alarmed, Jarvis said, because Mrs. Cobbett never went out of an evening and had no one to see her, and except what she said about her husband, led a perfectly quiet life, and did nothing that a breath of scandal could be breathed about.

But we kept our eyes pretty wide open after that,

though we never breathed a word to Mrs. Vernon Cobbett or to the nurse that we suspected anything; and one evening, hearing a creaking on the stairs after everybody had gone to bed, Jarvis went out and peered over the banisters, and distinctly saw Mr. Greenslade creeping down in his bare feet with a candle in his hand, which he blew out when he got into the hall, which made his movements certainly a mystery. Jarvis came back and told me, and I said, ‘As the master of the house it is your duty to see what this means. If you allow this sort of thing to go on I won’t.’ Jarvis, who was always a weak-minded man, and wanted stirring up to do anything, saw that I meant it, and so he plucked up his courage—it wanted a lot of plucking up when there was anything disagreeable to be done—and he put on a few things and his slippers, and crept down, too, and I lighted our candle and held it over the banisters for him. He stopped at the drawing-room floor and held up his hand to me, and I knew what he meant. The man was in Mrs. Vernon Cobbett’s sitting-room.

I guessed, of course, what he was doing there, prying about, and that was a nice thing, and made me go hot with indignation—the idea of one lodger prying about another lodger's rooms unbeknown to them in a respectable house at two in the morning!

Presently I saw a figure come out of the drawing-room and suddenly stop, and just as Jarvis was going to call out, it—the figure was Mr. Greenslade's—grasped him by the arm and put up his hand, as much as to say, 'For God's sake, not a word!' and then Mr. Greenslade beckoned my husband to follow him and come up to his room, which Jarvis did, and quite right, too; for it would have been a pretty scandal to have had a noise there and all the people coming out of their apartments to see what was the matter, in their night-gowns, in the middle of the night.

I went back into my room and threw some things on to make myself presentable, and then I went down to the third floor and went into Mr. Greenslade's room, feeling that something had to be done at once, and being determined not to leave

Jarvis to be humbugged or twisted round that private inquiry fellow's little finger.

Mr. Greenslade was sitting in his easy chair quite unconcerned and calm, and Jarvis was trembling violently with the cold and his teeth chattering, for he had crept down without his boots, and that strikes cold to you directly in the middle of the night if you are not used to it.

‘Ah, madam,’ said the fellow, as cool as a cucumber, ‘I’m very sorry to have roused you, too, from your beauty sleep; I offer you ten thousand apologies.’

‘I don’t want your apologies,’ said I, bristling up. ‘I want to know what business you have in Mrs. Vernon Cobbett’s room, and what right you have with that?’

I saw that he had her blotting-book in his hand, that being what he had been after, evidently.

‘My dear madam,’ he said, ‘if you will keep quiet there need be no scandal; if you insist upon making a fuss about what I have done there must be. I am merely going to try a very old dodge—

you have read about it in novels and seen it in plays. I am going to put a piece of looking-glass to the blotting-book and read what I can.'

I understood what he meant, and I said to my husband at once, 'Jarvis, if you allow this you are as bad as he is—the idea of reading anybody's private correspondence like that; it is infamous.'

'Quite so, madam,' said Mr. Greenslade, without moving a muscle of his face; 'but it's just this way. If you allow me to do what I want to do it will save you a lot of annoyance. First of all, my name isn't Greenslade; I am a detective officer, and this is my card.'

He handed us a card, on which we read the name of a well-known detective from Scotland Yard, and that put my heart in my mouth, you may be sure, and Jarvis left off chattering his teeth and turned positively blue—but then he never did have any nerve.

'I am here in the interests of justice,' he went on, 'and I therefore claim your assistance. The lady downstairs is the wife of Mr. Vernon Cobbett



—at least, she married him ; but she has for some time past been sending anonymous letters of a scandalous nature to his publishers, to his friends, to his tradespeople, and to the editors of newspapers, and he, in order to ascertain who was doing it, has placed the matter in the hands of the police. It was necessary he should do so, for some of the charges brought against him in these letters were of a criminal nature. The woman is an adventuress, and I have been tracing her career, following her visitors, and finding out with whom she is in correspondence, in order to discover if she has an accomplice. Her accomplice I have discovered—that is to say, I know who posts the letters for her now. She writes them here, but I want a proof, and it is probably in this book. She has blotted her letters in this—the impression of some of them will probably be here. Leave me quietly for an hour with this book and let me put it back in the room, and you will be assisting me to save a man who has been most shamefully treated from annoyance which means ruin to him.

Stop me, tell Mrs. Cobbett, create a disturbance, and what good will you get? She won't call in the police—if she did I should order them out again, but I shouldn't part with this book then, so you would have done no good.'

'But it is a horrible thing,' I said; 'how can we allow it?'

'You forget, madam, I have given you my card; I am a police-officer, and I am doing what I am doing in that character.'

'Well,' I said, turning to Jarvis, 'I suppose we must consent, but it seems a very mean thing. You will return the book to her room?'

'Certainly, in an hour, if you will kindly go to bed.'

Jarvis turned to me and said he thought, after what we had been told, we couldn't do any more than protest, which we had done, and so we went back to bed again; and left Mr. Greenslade with the book; but as to sleep, that was out of the question. The bare idea of having a detective doing his work under our roof, and our drawing-

rooms let to an anonymous letter-writer, was enough to keep the seven sleepers wide awake, as anyone who has a sensitive nature will admit.

The next morning after breakfast Mr. Green-slade came downstairs into our sitting-room, and said he supposed we would like to know what he was going to do. He had found out all he wanted, and he was going to have an interview with Mrs. Vernon Cobbett, and we might expect her to leave at once. As a matter of fact he had undertaken the job privately, with the permission of his chief, for Mr. Vernon Cobbett, who would not prosecute his own wife; so there would be no worry and no scandal, and we need not worry, and he was very much obliged to us, and he should leave that day, and of course pay a week's rent in advance in lieu of notice, and we could forget all about everything.

He went upstairs and went into Mrs. Vernon Cobbett's room, where she was at breakfast, and shut the door, and he was there for a quarter of an hour, and then he went to his own room, and began

to pack. An hour later Mrs. Vernon Cobbett sent for me, and told me she had to go away suddenly on private legal business. She settled up and paid everything we claimed, and that afternoon she and the nurse and the baby left, and we never saw anything of them again.

But a few months afterwards Jarvis met Mr. Greenslade in the street, and he told him that he had got the whole of that lady's record then ; and that Mr. Cobbett was free of her, for not only was she an adventuress who had trapped the unfortunate man into a marriage, but she was really a married woman at the time she did it, and having found out something about her first husband, who was a doctor on board an Australian liner, she had so frightened him that he agreed to leave her in peace, and never interfere with her whatever she did.

But Mr. Greenslade had found it all out, and Mr. Cobbett was going to get the marriage annulled, and we afterwards saw the case in the papers, and she never appeared to defend it. She knew better,

She gave up the child to its father and went abroad.

That was the secret of the third-floor mystery, and I am happy to say it was the first and last person we ever had take our apartments in the interests of justice, and I always knew that woman was no good, for people who speak vilely of others never are up to much themselves. And I've found that even with servants. If ever they begin to talk scandal about the people they've lived with before—— But I mustn't begin to write about servants; if I did, there would be no room in these memoirs for anything else.

## VII.

### *JARVIS.*

A FINE figure of a man, and a good husband he certainly was, poor dear, and I know he meant to make me happy, and he did for a time. And perhaps it wasn't his fault if he got to be a trial later on in life, and sometimes got on my nerves to that extent that I have had to lock myself in my room, and put my head under the counterpane, for fear the people in the house should hear me, and scream for a quarter of an hour to relieve my feelings.

It was after he was forty that he began to go wrong in his mind—not exactly violent, but he got miserable and depressed, and began to worry about his health, and was always going to die of some-

thing dreadful, and would sit in a chair for hours and stare in the fire and say that he cumbered the earth, and talk churchyards, which is not comforting to a woman bothered as I was, with the whims and vagaries of half a dozen people to put up with, to say nothing of servants, who would certainly, some of them, try the temper of a saint, which I never was, and never pretended to be.

It was all very well for him to say that he took after his poor mother, and to lay the blame on her, but I never had any patience with that sort of thing, and I used to say to him sometimes, if that was an excuse, why when a child did anything wrong the mother ought to be smacked; but he said that was silly, and that he was quite right—a man can't help having his father's nose or his mother's eyes. If people inherited features which they couldn't alter they also inherited constitutions and tempers, and moods, and things which they couldn't alter, and so what was the use of nagging them for what they hadn't done for themselves?

The first time he talked to me about nagging him

it put my back up, for if ever a woman bore a man's whims and oddities with the patience of one of Fox's 'Book of Martyrs,' I did; and though perhaps I did speak my mind out pretty plainly to him now and then, that a grown man ought to be ashamed of himself for giving way like he did, if only his little finger ached, I was never a nagger, or a scold, or a termagant—as some women are, and their husbands not allowed to say their souls are their own, which is a thing I never held with, always considering that a woman ought to be second to her husband, except, of course, in matters which men know nothing about.

Up to his fortieth year Jarvis was all that a husband should be, and a great help and a support to me, and I felt I had someone I could lean on except when there was something disagreeable to be said to anyone in the house, and then he was no more use than a sawdust doll, but used to leave me to do that sort of thing, such as complaining or giving notice to anyone who wasn't what we wanted in our apartments, and whenever there was trouble



of that sort he always had business, and would put on his hat and go out, and come back when it was all over. But in other things he was certainly useful, and all our ladies and gentlemen liked him, and I dare say some of them thought he was much nicer than me, because if they had let off fireworks in their bedrooms he wouldn't have said anything to them.

Something like that really did happen once—a young gentleman who was very dark, with a fearful name, who was a Japanese prince studying in London, blowing the window of his room right out with something in a glass jar which he called a chemical experiment, and a mercy we weren't all scattered about the neighbourhood beyond recognition.

I was out at the time after a servant's character, and when I came back and saw the crowd round the house and my second-floor window lying about in the roadway, I shall never know how I reached the house without being carried there—but I did, and a nice state I found all the ladies and gentlemen

in, declaring that they would all leave, and that we ought to be ashamed of ourselves taking foreign Nihilists into a respectable house. When I got up to the scene of the explosion—how my legs carried me up those stairs I shall never know—there was Jarvis standing like a great baby, sympathizing with that Japanese prince, and powdering him all over with the flour dredger, his moustache and eyebrows having been nicely scorched, which served him right. I'd have flour-dredged him if I had come into the room first, and though I dare say he was suffering, and burnt eyebrows aren't pleasant, I told him plainly what I thought, and told him I'd beg him to take himself and his chemical experiments off at once, and if he didn't pack up his things and put them on a cab within one hour I'd send for the police and have him put out, eyebrows or no eyebrows; and I should have the money out of him for the damage he had done to the house and to the furniture, to say nothing of the reputation of my establishment, if I sued him in every county court in the country. He jabbered

something in Japanese, and glared at me, and Jarvis stood there like an idiot, motioning me to be calm, and saying that the young gentleman was in great pain, and it was an accident, and he wouldn't be likely to try any experiments again; actually taking his part against me—his own lawful wife.

It was after that that his nerves began to go wrong, and he couldn't sleep at night, and the doctor said that he was suffering from gouty symptoms, and was worse through the gout never coming out; and Jarvis gave the doctor a pretty good dose of his poor mother, and how dreadfully she suffered from the same thing, and nothing after that ever convinced him that he wasn't going to be a dreadful invalid, and have horrible sufferings for the rest of his days.

I'd noticed for some time before that he was low-spirited, and used to sit and look in the fire, and not have his old energy, and it had made me a little anxious, because I'd heard such dreadful tales of the trouble men get into, and I was uneasy in my mind, wondering what it could be that was

making him so changed. It couldn't be betting, because he didn't, so far as I knew, even read the sporting news in the paper, and I'm sure he would have done that if he had been backing horses, because I knew from poor Annie all about her first husband, the livery-stable-keeper's son, who was what is called a sportsman, and he was reading about horses all day long, and looking to see what it was against this or that. I hoped it wasn't money trouble of any kind he was keeping from me ; but I didn't think it could be, because, though I never interfered with his money matters, I knew we always had enough, and we were doing well and paying our tradespeople's books regularly every Monday morning, which is the only way not to be cheated and avoid worry. I'm sure I have often thought that if I was like Mrs. Parker, the widow opposite, who was always well let, but in difficulties from morning till night, I should have drowned myself in the nearest canal. She would let her tradesmen's books run on for months, until she owed the butcher fifty pounds, and the baker

twenty, and the grocer thirty, and behindhand with the rent as well, and the taxes calling for the third and fourth time, even going so far as to have the roadway taken up in front of the house and the gas cut off for two quarters, which is a dreadful thing to happen publicly to a respectable woman.

But to see her go out all over finery, you would think she didn't owe a penny in the world and had the Bank of England at her back, and she was always having company to tea and supper, and the best of everything, and I dare say sleeping as soundly at night as if she didn't owe a penny in the world, and had never seen the inside of a county-court in her life.

I asked Jarvis at last if there was anything on his mind, and he said 'No,' only he felt low and depressed, and had pains, and he was afraid that he was going to have something with a long name, which I never could pronounce, let alone try to spell. I said, 'Oh, nonsense, you caught a chill the other day, coming home from the theatre outside a 'bus'—a foolish thing which he was in the

habit of doing after sitting squeezed up in a hot pit, being very fond of the theatre, especially Shakspeare, and pieces of that sort; though I can't say I cared for them much, preferring pieces that made you laugh all through, never having been one of the weeping sort. However people could go to the theatre as I have known Annie and mother and many more, to see pieces that made you keep on crying all the evening, and using your pocket-handkerchief, I never could understand, and I used to say, 'You call yourselves tender-hearted women, and yet you go and pay eighteenpence to see other people's children die, and call that an evening's amusement. You might as well have a day's outing going to a cemetery to watch the funerals.' And that's a thing that I have known people do, going miles through all sorts of weather, just to see some well-known person put into the grave, with the friends and relations sobbing on the edge of it. Give me a circus or a pantomime.

It was a chill that caused the symptoms after all, but when once the doctor had been called in, and

Jarvis had found out that he was gouty and had something wrong with his nervous system, he became so melancholy that it was really dreadful; and it grew on him as the years went on, and he began to coddle himself and dose himself and imagine he had everything awful that anybody could have. There is no doubt that his mother *was* like that, always fancying herself ill, and trying remedies, though of course the poor soul did suffer a great deal really, if what Jarvis told me about her was true; but that is no reason she should have tried all the old women's remedies under the sun, and taken every kind of patent medicine that had ever been invented.

The not sleeping at night and the groaning were the worst things about poor Jarvis, because there was no getting away from them; and the way he used to toss about sometimes at night, saying he wished he was dead, used to get on my nerves at last to such a degree that I have felt inclined to open the window and throw myself out of it.

After he got into that condition, he was very

hard to rouse to any interest in the house, and so everything fell on my shoulders, and I dare say that made me irritable and say things to him which I very much regret now that the poor dear is dead and gone, though he lived to a comfortable old age and had a peaceful end, but that was long after all that I have recorded here happened.

It was a young fellow who was studying medicine, and had rooms with us for a time, who first started Jarvis off seriously, through leaving his medical works and the *Lancet* about, and Jarvis, getting hold of some of them, read them, and one book which was about everything people can suffer from almost reduced him to a skeleton. He was quite convinced that he was suffering from some of the awful things because he had the symptoms, and he borrowed the *Lancet* every week, and used to read it and start suddenly, and go hot and cold when he came to a case that he thought was like his own. He began to read out to me one evening some of the awful things, but I said to him, ‘Jarvis, if you read me any of that stuff I shall put on my bonnet



and go out. We've all got to die of something—that's what we're here for, and I don't want to know what's going on in other people's insides.' I called what he suffered from 'Forebodings,' because he always got up every morning feeling as if something dreadful was going to happen, and after dinner he was just the same; he said that his heart used to go down suddenly into his boots, and he used to have cold shivers, and somebody walking over his grave on the nape of his neck, and if anybody knocked at the door it used to make him jump and feel as if it were an undertaker come to measure him.

Fancy that sort of thing going on often on a cold winter's night, and the melancholy wind howling outside, and your drawing-rooms unlet for a month; and then you can't wonder that sometimes when I felt a bit low myself and wanted cheering up I used to feel inclined to run away and never come back any more. I tried my best, I'm sure, to give him more courage and cheer him up, but it was no good. He wouldn't amuse himself, and he was quite listless. He'd given up smoking because

somebody who smoked had had cancer of the tongue; he gave up his wine and spirits and beer, because he had been told that to drink only cold water was a cure for his complaint. At one time he gave up meat because he had read it was animal food that caused disease, and I shall never forget him one Christmas Day, sitting opposite to me with a melancholy face, trying to look seasonable with a plate of mashed turnips in front of him and a big cupful of coffee to drink 'A Merry Christmas' to me in. Upon my word I could have given him a good shake, I felt so mad with him; and a lovely turkey on the table and a beautiful Yorkshire ham sent me by a gentleman who had our dining-rooms for the season three years running!

And the dreadful things he would take through reading cases of miraculous cures in the advertisements! I'm sure he spent a small fortune in quack medicines, and swore by every one of them for a month, and then started something else. He was only happy when he could get anyone to talk to him about his ailments, and really he did pick

up wonderfully when a German with a chronic liver complaint took the dining-rooms, and then he used to go up every day, and they would discuss each other's symptoms, and taste each other's medicine, and condole with each other, which I wouldn't have minded (for it cheered him up a bit, and kept him from groaning all day long in our sitting-room) if this gentleman hadn't recommended him to take gymnastic exercise. Oh, dear—oh, dear! shall I ever forget Jarvis fitting up a spare room we had with a trapeze fixed to two hooks in the ceiling, and buying a big child's rocking-horse and a set of dumb-bells? It was the rocking-horse that made me most indignant. That I should ever live to see a husband of mine, a grown man between forty and fifty, sitting astride a child's rocking-horse, and rocking himself to and fro to imitate riding in the Row, and persuading himself that he was going to be a new man and cure himself of the baker's dozen of fatal diseases from which he imagined he was suffering all at once!

He didn't keep on the gymnastics long—he

never did keep on anything long, although everything did him good at first—at least he thought it did, which is the same thing, faith being a wonderful cure, and you can persuade yourself into almost anything, like the man who was put in a warm bath in the dark and told he was going to be bled to death, and just had his arm scratched, and really did die, believing that he was losing his life's blood. And I have always said that if fear kills hundreds I am quite sure confidence cures thousands, which is the reason that old women's remedies when believed in often work such wonderful cures, though I never could bring myself to believe, like mother did, that you can bury something in a back garden and then dig it up again, and that that will charm away warts. But I do know that to rub a sty on the eyelid with a wedding-ring is good, if you believe it, though I have since been told that any ring would do it, but it was made a wedding-ring with poor people because that was gold, and so was not injurious, though why putting the key of the front door down

a child's back should stop its nose bleeding I never could get explained to me.

After the gymnastics had had their turn Jarvis met a gentleman at the Couriers' club, where he went one evening, and came back with a grand new remedy, which was nothing more nor less than onions; and he lived on them for a month, until everybody thought we had something terrible going on in the house from the servants always appearing to be crying when they went to the door, though it was only continually peeling onions for Jarvis that made their eyes water.

Poor dear! I am sure I was as patient with him as I could be, but I did get out of temper sometimes when he went about with a gloomy face groaning all over the house, and our room more like a doctor's shop, with his medicine bottles and his pill boxes and things, than a comfortable apartment in a Christian home.

But the most dreadful time I ever had with him was when he read in the papers about a man who had committed suicide through mental depression.

He talked suicide for months, and said he supposed that was what would be his end, and left off shaving himself because of the razor, and for fear he should have what he called 'a sudden impulse;' and when I said it was wicked nonsense to talk like that, and he ought to be ashamed of himself, he said that he had discovered that one of his mother's brothers drowned himself in the cistern, and that sort of thing always came out in the family, and no doubt he was going that way himself; and rare frights he used to give me, though I know people who talk about such things never do them. After he got that idea in his head he became irritable if he was worried about anything, and if I only said a word awry through anything having upset me in the house he would put on his hat and go out and say he would do something dreadful—throw himself under a 'bus or drown himself in Hampstead ponds, and many a time when he didn't come home after we'd had a few words I would get uneasy and put on my bonnet, and go about to look for him, once actually finding him sitting on a seat

in Regent's Park, opposite the lake, having given a little boy sixpence to hold him by his coat-tails, and made him promise to shout 'Police!' if he got up with a sudden impulse and walked towards the water.

I took his arm and marched him home, telling him that it was absolutely wicked of him to worry a poor woman to death as he was doing me, and saying that if ever he did that sort of thing again I would never let him out of my sight, but take away his clothes and lock him in the room if I had to go out. How on earth was I to attend to everybody in the house and think of everything, and be on my feet from morning till night, if I never knew from one moment to the other what idiotic thing he was going to be up to next?

But sometimes he would be all right for a little, and then he was as kind and gentle as ever, and would go out with me now and then of an evening to a friend's, or a place of amusement, and be a human being, and take an interest in the house, and quite forget all about his ailments until some-

one reminded him of them, and then he would be bad again.

The worst of all was when he couldn't sleep through his nerves—of course that was like his poor mother, and he used to tell me that she would be like that for weeks, and get up and walk about the house and go upstairs and downstairs in the middle of the night a dozen times, and put her head out of window in the middle of the winter to make her feel heavy and want to drop off—and he told me all the remedies for sleeplessness. Many a night have I gone to bed tired out, and been kept awake by poor Jarvis counting sheep out loud up to millions in a dreary voice, and then lighting a candle and reading, and me always in a mortal terror that he would doze off and leave it to set fire to the curtains, which were only pushed back. I stood that for a time, but I did put my foot down at last when he told me that if you couldn't sleep you ought to have a plate of hard biscuits by the bed and eat one from time to time, and that drove the blood from the head to the digestion and let you go



to sleep. There's nothing in the Marriage Service which says it is the duty of a wife to let her husband eat biscuits in bed at three and four in the morning. I was a light sleeper, and directly he began biting the hard biscuits the noise woke me up with a start; but the worst thing of it all was the crumbs in the bed, which were simple torture to lie on, and you might just as well have expected to lie comfortably on a bag of nails.

But, with all his queer ways and his worries, I loved him, and if only he hadn't given way, and got so dreadful, especially in the daytime, being generally brighter after the gas was lighted, as I have heard many people similarly affected are, he would have been the best husband a woman could have had, and now he has gone I think only of his good qualities. Never once in his life did he make me uneasy through drinking, as some men in his position do, or cause me a pang of jealousy, or say a really cruel thing to me; and when one knows what some women suffer that is much to be thankful for.

Mrs. Peckover, who lived opposite to us and let apartments principally to people who came from the country to have operations, had a very different

husband, and I'm sure my heart bled for her, and made me thank God for Jarvis. It was bad enough for her, poor thing, to be always living in the smell of chloroform, for I'm sure whenever the doctors came out of her house with those dreadful black bags the chloroform used to come into our front windows, if the wind was blowing in that direction, strong enough to make you fancy you were in hospital ; and that brute of a husband of hers, Mr. Peckover, would go about to the public-houses in the neighbourhood maudlin and talking about his domestic affairs all day long, and come home at all hours unable to use his latchkey, and then begin banging away at the knocker, which of course was dreadful with a house full of invalids, so that, to save her connection being ruined, the poor woman would sit in a hall chair behind the door listening at the keyhole for his footstep, in order to let him in before he made a row, and then take off his boots, and almost carry him upstairs for fear he should stagger outside anybody's door and frighten them.

And one night that the poor woman—who had had a most busy day, there having been three operations in the house and one fatal—had fallen

asleep, and didn't hear the beauty come on the step as usual, he gave such a terrific bang that she, frightened in her sleep, jumped up with a shriek, and that so terrified a lady who was in a most critical condition that she never got over it; and the nurses put it about what it was, and the doctors who recommended patients told her she must either get rid of her husband or lose their patients, and the poor thing said she couldn't turn her husband out of doors, being devoted to him—as hard-working women often are to the men who least deserve it—and gradually lost her connection, and had to give up the house and take one of a different kind, which did badly, and the last we heard of her was she was going out as housekeeper to a widower, and her precious husband had gone off nobody knew where with the barmaid of a house where he used to spend his time and all his wife's money.

No; with all his trying ways and peculiarities Jarvis was always a good husband at heart, and worth a hundred such as poor Mrs. Peckover, who used to live opposite, had.

## VIII.

### *YOUNG MR. SOMERSET*

HE had a bedroom and a sitting-room on the second floor, and I fancy I can hear his loud, merry voice ringing through the house, and shouting out, 'Mother !' as I sit down to write about him now. I was a middle-aged woman when he came to us, and I suppose I had grown to be a little motherly in my ways to young folks, and he took to me, and I took to him from the first, poor boy ; and somehow, when he called me mother in his wild, harum-scarum way, I didn't mind it a bit. Nobody minded what he did, and even Jarvis, who had grown crotchety and fidgety and irritable, took kindly to him, and seemed to brighten up when he came downstairs into our room, as he would some-

times, and sat on the table, and smoked a pipe, and talked a lot of wild nonsense. And even once when he slapped poor Jarvis on the back, forgetting his rheumatics, which, if it had been anyone else, would have made him fly into a rage, Jarvis only coloured a bit, and grimaced, and said, ‘Charge a broken shoulder-blade in Mr. Somerset’s bill, my dear, and two bottles of embrocation.’

What a bright young fellow he was, to be sure, and heigh ho ! how often I wonder what became of him—whether he went utterly to the dogs, or pulled up in time. Perhaps he’s mended and grown stout and settled down now, and perhaps—Well, well, I won’t think anything but good about him, for I suppose it was his bringing up that did it.

He was about six-and-twenty when he came to us, a gentleman every inch of him, as you knew directly he spoke to you ; and dressed always a perfect picture of a fashionable young Englishman, and his things all of the very best, with a beautiful silver dressing - case, and everything with his

monogram on, and the loveliest things about his room in bachelor knick-knacks and cigarette cases, and the loveliest pearl studs and neatest jewellery that I ever saw in my life. He brought a valet with him—a most respectable man—that he worried nearly out of his life, and treated quite familiarly, and who was devoted to him, and who, I do believe, would have thrown himself down under an omnibus or a tramcar if it could have done his master any good. But the valet wasn't gay, poor fellow; he had been with Mr. Somerset some time, and he knew how things were going, and told us when we knew him better that he was afraid his young master wasn't fit to manage his own affairs, and he wished he had somebody with good influence over him to look after him.

‘Just a little bit mad!’ Jarvis used to say he was, and I suppose he was right; but it was a madness that made everybody about him happy and bright. And that he was never anybody's enemy but his own I'm as certain as I am that I sit here in my lonely room writing to-night, and

take off my glasses and wipe them, as I think of that bright young man who used to call me 'Mother.'

He hadn't been with us long before we would have done anything for him, from the charwoman who came in once a week to help with the house-cleaning, to Jarvis, who would forget half his ailments, and go and sit upstairs with him and smoke, and pretend to drink whisky-and-water with him till one in the morning, when Mr. Somerset felt a bit hipped, as he called it, and none of his young men friends had come to see him, and he didn't care to go to old haunts, 'for reasons.'

He had, so his valet Johnson told us afterwards, come into a decent fortune when he came of age—his father and mother both being dead—and had gone the pace, and let everybody impose upon him. And what with his being open-handed and generous, and flinging his money away, racing and gambling, and leading a gay life, and having had splendid chambers, and been run after by a bad set of men

and women who had helped him to get rid of his money, at last he had been compelled to give up everything, and go quietly into apartments and try and live on what was left; and he came to us, having heard, as he said, that we were 'the right sort' from a young gentleman whose mother had stayed with us when she came up from her house in the country for a few weeks in town.

Johnson told us that his young master had said to him, 'Look here, old chap, I can't afford to keep you on, you know. You'd better go and get a good berth somewhere, where there's something to be made, and where you'll get on.' But Johnson wouldn't hear of leaving him, and said he'd sooner take no wages than do it, and so Mr. Somerset said, 'Well, all right, old chap, we'll see; perhaps the luck will turn.' And so he came with him, and was devoted to him, body and soul, being more like a respectful brother than a servant, and I wish there were more such servants about.

I think Jarvis really was right, and Mr. Somerset was just a little bit mad—at any rate he was odd,



and did the oddest things. I used to stop and talk to him nearly every day, and he would have made me laugh even if I had just come from a funeral with the way he would go on; and sometimes, when the servants were in his room, I used to hear such shrieks of laughter that I would go up and look quite cross, and say, 'Really, Mr. Somerset, I cannot allow you to go on with the girls like this—what will the people in the house think?' And I used to look as cross as I could at the girls—but it was no good—he would start some foolery, and I used to have to go out of the room to keep my countenance.

There wasn't a new comic song that came out but he knew it, and would imitate the people in the music-halls who sang them, and really it was quite wonderful; and the girls would stand there, he calling them in when they were at work on that floor, and laugh till the tears ran down their cheeks, and would be singing the words they had caught of him down in the kitchen when my back was turned.

There wasn't a bit of real harm in him, but of course it wasn't right for your housemaid and parlourmaid to be in a young gentleman's room for half an hour at a time while he was carrying on, and giving a music-hall entertainment; and once I caught him showing the housemaid a lot of tricks with cards, and making her choose one, and then throwing the pack, and making her card stick against the wall, and I had to put my foot down at that, saying that it was a nice thing—the work standing still and her playing cards with a gentleman at eleven o'clock in the morning.

And when she'd gone out of the room if he didn't make me stop in the room for quite a quarter of an hour, listening to his nonsense, and telling me a story of a young clergyman from the country he and some young fellows had taken round London the night before, and told the most dreadful stories to about everything, winding up by taking him to a music-hall, and introducing him to a comic singer in the audience as a good man who was deeply interested in weaning the masses from frivolous

entertainments, and urging the clergyman to take his arm, and walk round the building, and say a few earnest words to some of the young men who were there; and they went down the grand promenade together—all the young fellows shrieking with laughter to see the comic singer, who was rather broad in his songs, arm and arm with a young, simple-looking curate from the country, who thought he was talking to a sort of music-hall missionary. The comic singer stopped several young fellows who, of course, knew him quite well, and put on a very serious face, and said very solemnly, ‘My young friend, does your dear mother know you are here?’ and they, being in the know, pretended to be suddenly conscience-stricken, and put their handkerchiefs to their eyes and sobbed; and then the young clergyman thought he ought to say something, and he did so to one or two, and everybody got up in the stalls to see what was the matter, and what a lot of young men were pretending to cry about. And there was such confusion that the manager came and told the young

clergyman that if he couldn't behave himself decently he would be turned out, and he ought to be ashamed of himself to come there the worse for liquor, and he a clergyman. And that made him so indignant that he banged his umbrella on a counter and yelled, 'Sir! how—how dare you! My friend, this worthy man'—meaning the comic singer—'and myself are doing good work. We are——' and then there was a yell of laughter from everybody, and the young fellows who had got it all up dragged the young curate away; but he stood outside in the street and denounced the building as 'the abode of sin,' and a policeman came up and ordered him to move on.

Of course it was very wicked, but the way Mr. Somerset told it—imitating the young curate and the comic singer—made me laugh till the tears came in my eyes. And then he would say the most absurd things, asking me if I would go to the races with him, and if I thought Jarvis would be jealous, and declaring if he had met me twenty years earlier he would have cut Jarvis out, and a lot of

nonsense of that sort, till I used to say, 'You silly boy, won't you ever learn to be serious?' But he was really very nice and kind, and would bring me flowers, and present them to me as if I had been a duchess; and once when I was ill he would insist on coming into the room, though, I told him it wasn't proper, and he sat on a chair and read a book to me, and, Jarvis having been called downstairs, gave me my medicine; and, really, if he had been my own son he couldn't have been more attentive—as good-hearted a young fellow as ever breathed, and I am sure if he had had a father and mother or anyone to really care for him he would have been a credit to them.

After my illness, when I got better, I was always 'mother' to him, and I never went near him but it was, 'Halloa, mother, how are you to-day? Pulling yourself together, eh? That's right.' And he would meet the housemaid on the stairs, carrying up the coals, and he would take the scuttle from her, though she struggled, and run up with it, saying his legs were the youngest, which, as she was only

twenty, wasn't true ; and once, to my horror, I saw him march up to old Lady Treeson, who was a religious widow, in the dining-rooms, carrying the scuttle, as bold as brass and as demure as a parson, and put the scuttle down, and sweep up the hearth with a broom, until she shrieked, ' Good gracious, Mr. Somerset, what will you do *next* ? ' bobbing her cap on straight, because it had got on the back of her head and was showing a bald place.

She wanted to convert him once, and sent him up some tracts, and said he was a charming young man, but dreadfully wild ; and the scapegrace took the tracts and sent back his compliments in a little note, and would she honour him with her presence at a little tea-party he was giving that afternoon, and he would introduce her to some of the nicest young men in London, all bachelors !

But when she suffered from one of her bad headaches he was as quiet as a lamb and came downstairs without singing a comic song or shouting out ; and though he would say that she wanted a brandy-and-soda, he always sent down his compli-

ments, and hoped she was better ; and when he met her out in her bath-chair, he would walk by it a little, and talk to her quite nicely and quietly, and make himself most agreeable.

He was much too free with his money and spoilt our servants, giving them half-crowns for doing any little thing for him which was really their duty, and I had to tell him of it, saying it wasn't fair to the other people in the house who weren't so generous, and it spoilt the servants—which is true. The people who give too many tips make it bad for the people who don't throw their money about, and the servants get to make a difference in their attention, being only human.

But one day, after he had been with us about a year, I went into his room, not thinking he was there—everything was so quiet—and I found him with a look on his face I had never seen before. He was staring at the fire, and looking very down-cast and miserable. He looked up when I came in and tried to smile, and said :

‘Hulloa, mother, is that you ! What's the

matter—has Jarvis been hitting you, and have you come to me for protection ?’

I wasn’t to be put off like that, and I asked him if anything was the matter.

‘Oh no, nothing particular,’ he said. ‘I’m a peg too low, that’s all.’

‘No, that’s not it,’ I said ; ‘you are worried about something.’

‘Well, if you must have it, I am—just a bit. I’ve had a bit of a knock, but it will be all right again soon, I expect.’

I tried to get out of him what it was, but he began to chaff and pretend to be merry again, and I gave it up and went downstairs.

Johnson, the valet, was there, having just come in. I saw he was worried, too, and I asked him what had happened, and he looked very serious, and said that Mr. Somerset’s affairs were very bad, and that he was afraid if he didn’t get some money from a relative he had been trying to borrow from, he would be made a bankrupt. He was terribly in debt, and it seems that to pay us



lately Johnson had been pawning his master's jewellery.

Of course that was very dreadful, and it upset me very much, and I could have cried, but I didn't like to take any notice to Mr. Somerset; I felt that it would hurt him. But a week later, while I was sitting in my room, a knock came at the door, and Mr. Somerset's voice said, 'Can I come in?' He came in, looking very pale, and he said, 'Mother, I'm going to leave you—I'm going away.'

I was very sorry, though I had half expected it, and I said so, and looked miserable, which I couldn't help doing, poor boy! and I told him if he liked to stay on for a time he could, and I shouldn't worry him about anything.

He took my hand and gripped it, and the tears came into his eyes and his lip quivered.

'Mother,' he said, 'you've been a good friend to me, and so has your husband, and I shall feel like leaving a home; but it must be. God bless you for your kindness, I know you mean it; but—but

I've got to do something for myself now, and I dare say it's all for the best.'

'What are you going to do?' I said.

'Oh, I don't know—something. I've had nothing but bad luck lately, and I've come a cropper at last. I'm worried about Johnson, poor old chap, but he'll soon get another shop. He's a treasure, and some of my old pals will take him on, I'm sure, or recommend him. I'm going to-morrow. I may as well make a dash at it, and get it done; but I thought I'd let you know at once, because you can let my rooms.'

'But you'll have to live somewhere?' I said, wondering if there was nothing we could do to help him.

'Oh, yes, I suppose so; but that will be all right. I've got an uncle who'll pay what I owe and save me from being made bankrupt by a beast of a Jew who's discounted bills for me and won't wait because he thinks I'm broke; so that will leave me free to go away, and I'm going to try to get a berth somewhere abroad. I'm a useless sort of chap,

worse luck ; but I can shoot and drive, and I'm strong and can rough it, and perhaps something will turn up at which I can be useful and get a living. But there, don't you grizzle about me, mother. I'm young and strong, and I've got plenty of pluck, and I dare say a bit of roughing it will do me good. I'm sorry to leave you—you've made me jolly comfortable, and I shall always think of the time I was with you. There,—there don't take on. I want to go away with my head high if I can.'

He gave me a little nod and went out, and I felt it so much I was obliged to sit down and have a good cry. I couldn't have been sorrier if it had been my own son,—he was such a brave, good-hearted young fellow, and I was sure if he had gone wrong and been foolish, it was because he had never had any home influence or good advisers to keep him steady.

It was a sorrowful parting the next day. He paid up every penny, and gave the servants half-a-sovereign each, which I told him was wicked, but

he would do it ; and then when his things were on the cab, he came back into the hall and took my hand and pressed it, and I saw he would like to cry—big man that he was, and I couldn't have helped it if I knew I should be shot for it. I gave one great long sob and took his bonny face between my hands and kissed him on the cheek, and said, 'God bless you! We shall all miss you so much.' And then he broke down himself and gave a queer little cough, and was in the cab and off, and we all stood at the door, and looked after him, and I could see nothing much for my tears ; and when I went back into the hall and shut the door with a heavy heart there were the housemaid and the parlourmaid with their aprons up to their eyes, and I couldn't say a word to them, for I knew what I felt myself.

And old Lady Treeson came out as I passed her door, and told me she was very sorry Mr. Somerset was gone, and she hoped he would turn over a new leaf, for he was a fine young man spoilt by bad example, and she didn't think she had done her

duty—she ought to have tried harder to convert him before he went. Poor old soul! she meant well and she really liked the boy. I can't help thinking of him as a boy, though he was six-and-twenty, but she wasn't the sort of woman to convert Mr. Somerset. It wanted a good woman about forty years younger than she was to do that.

We didn't hear anything of Mr. Somerset for a long time—Johnson having got a situation with a gentleman in Scotland, and writing us after a time to say that he had heard nothing himself of his young master—but we often spoke of him, Jarvis and I, and wondered how he was getting on and where he was. But about a year afterwards one night I had been to a concert, for which we always took tickets of the postman, and as I came out of St. James's Hall with a friend who lived next door to us, wanting to get home quickly, as Jarvis was not very well and hated me to be away, I got into a hansom and gave the address, and we drove off. It was a beautiful hansom, and a lovely horse, and we both said what a nice turn-out it was, and I

said, 'I shall give the man sixpence over his fare—it is worth it.' And when we got out I took my purse out and had only a half-sovereign. I held it up to the man and said, 'Can you give me change?' and a voice that made my heart stand still said, 'No, mother—why, my little mare would be ashamed of me if I took a fare from you.'

It was Mr. Somerset—Mr. Somerset driving a hansom cab.

'Oh, Mr. Somerset!' I said, gasping for breath, I was so astonished; 'you—don't mean to say you are—are a cabman!'

'It looks like it, doesn't it?' he said, quite cheerily; 'but I like it, and I am doing fairly well. How's Jarvis? Ill, poor old chap? There, don't stare at me like that. I'm all right. Good-night.'

And before I could say a word he had driven off again.

It gave me such a turn I couldn't touch my supper; and when I told Jarvis, he quite forgot

his aches and pains, and said, 'Poor young chap, poor young chap!'

It was about six months after that, one morning when I came down to breakfast, there was a letter for us on the table. I opened it and looked at the signature, as I always do first when I don't know the handwriting, and it was signed 'Hugh Somerset.'

It was a nice, cheerful letter, and I have it put away in my desk now with the letters Jarvis wrote me in the old happy days when we were courting.

'DEAR MOTHER,' it said,

'The last time you saw me I was driving a cab, and I know it knocked you a little, didn't it? You liked me, and I always reckon you among my few true friends, and so you will be glad to hear the luck has taken a little turn. I drove an old friend the other day by accident—a fellow who is as rich as old Croesus, and he turned out a brick, and made me borrow enough money of him to go over to a place in America where there's land to be had cheap, and a good thing, so they say, to be done by a fellow

like me with plenty of go about him ; and I always could “go,” couldn’t I, mother?—a bit too fast sometimes, eh?—and so I’ve taken it and I’m off, and I won’t come and say “good-bye” again, because it makes me feel “cheap.” I haven’t forgotten the last time I said “good-bye” to you. But I believe I shall do well, and I’m going to have a big try, and—when I come back a millionaire I shall come to your place first and wake you and poor old Jarvis up ; so just you wait a year or two, and then listen for a bang or two on your front door that will send all the nervous people in the street out in search of quiet lodgings for a change. I am taking out an entirely new stock of comic songs and a sound constitution, and what can a fellow want more ? I shall often think of my good little mother out there, and you won’t forget me, I know. If I *do* make a million, I’ll bring it home quick, and you’ll be the first girl I’ll take out to dinner if you can square Jarvis not to be jealous. With kindest regards, always yours sincerely,

‘HUGH SOMERSET.’



I laughed at the idea of his taking me out to dinner and Jarvis being jealous. It was just a little of his old self, but I was glad I shouldn't have to go on thinking of him as a hansom cabman, poor young gentleman! and I made up my mind I should always think of him in future as rich and prosperous and making things lively out in that American place. When I read the letter to Jarvis he shook his head at the millionaire part, and said he did not think Mr. Somerset would ever be that. He was too good-hearted and free with his money, and would let everybody impose upon him.

I said I hoped he had learned wisdom, and Jarvis said that was a thing people learned at the beginning of their career or not at all; but he was grumpy and irritable, so I didn't let what he said alter my own firm belief that we should have Mr. Somerset knocking at our door as a millionaire from America some day or other.

Well, it's years ago now, and he hasn't knocked

yet, though sometimes even now when an extra loud knock comes I jump up and say, 'Mr. Somerset!' but it never is—it's generally a begging letter, or a tax-collector, or somebody who's knocked at the wrong door. The people who knock at the wrong number always knock louder than anybody else. But I haven't given up hop—— 'Good gracious! what was that? The idea of knocking like that at this time of night! Mary, see who it is.'

It was HIM. When I told him I was just writing about him at the very moment, he wouldn't believe it till I brought him down into my room and showed him the paper.

Him! But grown stout, as I thought he would be, and brown with the sun, and a beard, but just as handsome as ever, and as merry, and his voice, if possible, louder than ever. I wished Jarvis had been here to see him come back, as I always said he would.

He isn't a millionaire, but he's rich, and he's married, and taken a big house in London, and

I'm going there to-morrow to dine with him, and he's going to tell me all his adventures, and show me his little girl and the wife he is so proud of, and who, he says, helped him to make a fortune.

And he's found out Johnson, he tells me, and Johnson is to be his butler, and he declares that after dinner he'll make Johnson stop in the room, and he'll sing the only comic song he can remember, just for the sake of the old times—only he doesn't think he will be quite as funny as he used to be.

And he has promised me that one day he will bring his wife here to have tea with me; and he wants it to be, if possible, in the old room on the second floor, which was his when he made us all so fond of him. If possible! Why, if the Czar of Russia was in it I'd make him go out for the day rather than Mr. Somerset should be disappointed by his old 'mother.'

## IX.

### *OUR LAST FOREIGNER.*

It was the most terrible affair that ever happened in our house. I have never talked about it much, and it is the sort of thing one likes to forget, but I cannot omit it from these memoirs, as that would be leaving out the most extraordinary experience I ever had as a landlady.

It was in the summer that a gentleman who called himself Mr. De Lorme came and took our dining-room floor, and well I remember him coming, it being between the lights in the evening that he knocked at our front door ; and the housemaid happening to be out on an errand and cook not presentable, and the knock an aristocratic one rather, I went upstairs myself to open the door,

and saw a pair of the most wonderful eyes I ever saw in my life staring out of a pale white face, covered all over with a black beard and moustache that only made it look the whiter.

I can see those eyes now as they gazed at me then, and for long after they haunted me ; and I seemed to see them gleaming in the dark for months after the event, which made the greatest sensation we ever had, and no respectable household with apartments to let would ever want many like it.

When I looked at the strange man on the doorstep, and his black shining eyes were suddenly flashed upon me, I felt half inclined to scream and bang the door to, but of course that would have been absurd, and I didn't do it.

' You have apartments to let, madame ? ' he said to me, as I stood staring at him and unable to speak.

' Yes, sir—the dining-rooms, ' I answered, hardly knowing how I got the words out ; ' we have the dining-room floor, but perhaps you had better see my husband, '

I never let Jarvis interfere with the letting of the rooms, he being so silly, and listening to all the fault found and generally apologizing for all the shortcomings that everybody pointed out, which is fortunately not my habit, or I should have spent my life lying down to be trampled on, and my worst enemy can't say that I ever did that ; but on this occasion I felt that I should be glad for somebody to be standing beside me on the mat.

But the gentleman would not hear of my sending for my husband. 'Not necessare, not necessare ; I will just look over the rooms,' he said, 'and let you know if they will suit me.' And in he walked.

I opened the dining-room door and let him go in first, and glad I was to have his eyes off me for a moment. He was a foreigner I knew by the way he spoke, though it wasn't at all bad English, only in one or two words, and he had a Leicester Square sort of look about the beard and moustache. I have always thought it strange that you can generally tell a man isn't English by his face, though it is sometimes more difficult to tell a

foreign lady when you see one if she is fair—the dark ones you generally know.

The foreign gentleman looked about the dining-room, and he then went into the bedroom and looked about that. He did one or two things which I thought rather odd—for instance, going to the bedroom window and opening it and looking out.

‘That’s the back-yard, sir,’ I said, ‘and there’s no dustbin,’ fancying he was like some of the people who come and who don’t like dustbins and water-butts or drains just under the bedroom window, which is natural.

‘Ah,’ he said, ‘the back-yard, and you are well shut in. The wall at the back, is there a street or passage behind it?’

‘No, sir; that’s a mews: the buildings that touch our back walls are stables, as you can see.’

‘Oh! and your window here, it only fastens with the knob here. There are no shutters?’

‘No, sir, but there’s no necessity for shutters; there’s nothing but the bare wall for a burglar to

climb up to get in if he wanted to, and it's a good height from the ground.'

I thought he was nervous of burglars, for I couldn't see what else it could be.

Then he went into the front room and looked at the windows there.

'There are shutters to these?' he said.

'Oh, yes, sir,' and I pulled them out and showed him; 'but you need not be afraid of burglars. We had a family once that was, and we had bells put on all the shutters and doors; you can have them if you like on yours, though they are not things I care for, being likely to go off in the night sometimes by themselves, and that upsets everybody, which is not pleasant.'

'Ah, well, we will talk about that after—for the present I shall take your rooms.'

'Thank you, sir, I, er—of course, you know it is usual to ask for a reference.'

'Ah, certainly, madame, of course; I forgot!' He took out a card, wrote something in pencil, and handed it to me.



‘That is my name ; I have written the name of a solicitor below it—he will satisfy you.’

On the card was printed his name, Paul De Lorme, and below he had written the name of a solicitor in Craven Street, Strand.

I thanked him, and he said if I was agreeable he would like to come in on the following Monday—it was Thursday then—and I said : ‘ Yes, that would do,’ and he bowed very politely and went away ; but long after I had closed the door I could see his eyes, and I don’t know why it was, but the effect on me was to make me have what children call gooseflesh, which is a creepy sensation up the arms.

I went downstairs and gave the card to Jarvis, and I said that I had a presentiment that man if he came would bring us trouble. Of course Jarvis, when I said that it was because of his eyes and his being a foreigner, laughed at me, and said I was a regular Englishwoman on the subject of foreigners, always thinking them villains or something dreadful, but if I had lived abroad as he had for years I

should know there were good and bad foreigners just as well as good and bad English people.

That was all very well, but I'm not a fool, and I am pretty quick at reading character, as any woman ought to be who has to let strange people into her house to sleep under the same roof, and be free of everything in the dead of night; and I know fierce eyes like that, looking out of a pale face with a beard all round it like a frame, always mean something mysterious. I told Jarvis about the shutters and Mr. De Lorme's looking out into the back-yard, and he said that was nothing, that many people were like that, and he himself for years, in a strange hotel, when travelling, always opened the cupboards and wardrobes and looked under the beds, not because he was a coward, but because it was a precaution. And as to looking under the beds, I confess I always did that myself as a girl, going down on my knees and holding the candle and looking for the man, who, of course, was never there, it not being usual, except in books, for robbers to do that sort of thing. And once I was

holding the candle like that and I let the drapery round the bed drop, and it caught the candle, and was alight directly, and I singed all my hair, and a nice talking-to mother gave me for it; and I think I never looked under the bed afterwards, though often if I heard the slightest noise I would wake up in a cold perspiration, and tremble; but then I always was nervous as a girl.

Mr. De Lorme's references were all right. I wished they hadn't been, for I couldn't shake off the idea that we should have worry with him. He came in at the time he said he would, bringing a lot of foreign-looking luggage with him, and he soon had a lot of books and things about the place; but everything was foreign, and on his writing-table, the first time I went in, I noticed a photograph in a silver frame of a very beautiful young woman. It was a face that you couldn't help noticing and thinking about. There was a sad look about it, and the face seemed almost speaking to you. Whenever I went into the room when Mr. De Lorme was out I always used to look at it and

say to myself, 'Whoever you are, my dear, you are not a happy woman—you've had trouble.' I concluded, of course, it was his sweetheart, though, perhaps, it might have been his wife, except that I think it is always much more likely when a man puts a photograph in a silver frame in front of him it is his sweetheart and not his wife—wives are generally put away in a drawer somewhere and only brought out occasionally.

Mr. De Lorme, when he was at home, was generally writing. He used to write a lot of letters, but we never knew who they were to, because he always went to the post himself, and I thought that was rather odd. The letters that came to him generally had foreign stamps on, though sometimes one or two were English. He was very quiet, and never gave us any trouble, only having his breakfast in the house as a rule, and sometimes lunch, but dining out nearly always, Jarvis said probably at one of the foreign restaurants, because many of these foreign people, he told me, could never get used to our English cooking, especially

vegetables, which, it seems, they eat on a plate by themselves, and they always wanted as many courses for half-a-crown as an Englishman would expect for a guinea a head, or a dinner at the Mansion House.

I was very glad he did dine out, for while he was with us we had a cook who was simply dreadful, though so willing that I hadn't the heart to scold her much. But she was in love with a barman at the public-house near us, and that was her ruin, for she would always be inventing excuses to get out; and eventually, I suppose through having to drink to go into the bar to see him, she took to it, poor thing! but only got muddled, not so bad that we knew for a long time what was the matter, but she did certainly send up some dinners that if we hadn't had most good-tempered people in the house at the time would have led to continual grumbling, and perhaps have driven them away.

So I was glad Mr. De Lorme dined out, for his own sake as well as ours. And really the only thing that he fidgeted about at all was his having

the bells at the shutters and being so particular that nobody who asked to see him should ever be let in, but always be told he didn't live there; as he said the only people who could possibly come would want to bother him. Jarvis said that meant creditors most likely.

There was just one other thing we didn't quite like about him; that was his smoking cigarettes all day long. The room used to get full of cigarette smoke by the time he had been a few hours at it, and when his door was opened the hall would get full and it would go upstairs, which worried an old lady very much on our third floor, who was a little bronchial. And he never would have the front windows open after he was up and sitting in his room, but always had the white curtains drawn close across them.

He used to go out to dinner about half-past six and come home nearly always before eleven, and after that he used to sit and write on big, thin, square paper—sometimes pages of it, because the girls have seen him when they have gone in the

last thing to see if he wanted anything before they went to bed, that being the custom in our house.

It prevents the people ringing for anything, which they are often inconsiderate enough to do, after the girls are upstairs and undressing.

Mr. De Lorme had been with us about three months when the affair happened which I shall remember as long as I live.

I had gone to bed on the previous evening very much annoyed about twelve o'clock, as cook, who had permission to go out for the evening, had not come in ; but nobody sat up for her as she had, I found, taken a spare latchkey with her, which was like her impudence, and I said to Jarvis: 'That woman goes out of my house to-morrow, if I have to do the cooking myself.' She had told us she was going to the theatre with her young man and his friend, but she ought to have been in at midnight certainly.

I was just dressing in the morning when there came a loud knock at the door—Jarvis was dozing, having had a sleepless night with his nerves—and

Jane, the housemaid, cried out, 'Oh, ma'am, come quick, there's something terrible happened to Mr. De Lorme.' I ran downstairs with my heart in my mouth, the girl gasping and hysterical, and unable to say anything more, and I went into Mr. De Lorme's room and saw him leaning on the table, sitting in his chair.

The girl had seen him like that and it had frightened her, and she had not opened the shutters, and so it was very dark. I flung the shutters open, and then I shrieked with horror. The poor man was sitting there covered with blood, and I screamed 'He's been murdered!' and ran to the front door and called in a policeman, and then ran up to Jarvis and gasped out what had happened. He was dressed in a few minutes and came down, and it was a terrible thing he discovered. The policeman had sent the servant for the nearest doctor, who had come in, and it was found that Mr. De Lorme, though not dead, had been stabbed between the shoulders with some sharp instrument. The chair was soaked with blood, and the table in front



of him, and the paper on which he was writing in a foreign language were simply crimson with it. The doctor said it was a bad case, and as the hospital was close at hand it was best to take him there, as he would have the best skill, and it might be a long case if he didn't die at once, and we didn't know his means; so they carried him into a cab and took him away, two detectives who had been sent for coming in and taking possession of the room.

I hardly knew what I was doing. It was such a horrible thing. It seemed like a nightmare and not real; but while they were asking me questions I looked round the room, and suddenly I noticed the silver photograph frame. The frame was empty; the photograph of the beautiful young woman was gone.

‘It's gone!’ I said.

‘What?’ said the detective.

Then I told him about the photograph, and they made a note of it and took the frame, and I heard one of them say to the other ‘Jealousy.’ But they could not understand, no more could I, how on

earth the villain had got in, for the shutters were quite fast when I came in. The window in the bedroom was shut and bolted inside, and cook, who had come in late, declared she had shut the door after her.

It was cook that the police questioned most. She had come in about one, she said, and she declared she was sober, though she looked very red about the eyes, and had a headache, she confessed, herself. She had been to the Adelphi with her young man and a friend of his, and they had seen her to the door. 'Had she put the bolt on and the chain up?' No, she hadn't, because she didn't know if everybody was in, some of our people sometimes coming in very late—one gentleman in particular on the second floor, who belonged to a club. She declared all was quiet when she came in, and there was not a sound in Mr. De Lorme's room, and the door was shut; but she thought he was writing, as he usually did late at night, as she heard him cough in the sitting-room.

Everybody in the house was asked questions, but

everybody the night before had been in before twelve, and so nobody had noticed anything. It was certainly a mystery how it had all been done so quietly. How did the wretch get in and leave no trace? And the policeman who had been on the beat all night was examined, and he had seen no one to notice particularly, and had heard nothing.

It was not until the first horror of the discovery was over that I appreciated how dreadful it was for us. Somehow it had got about and people began to stop in front of the house and stare up at it, and when the afternoon papers came out I thought I should have gone mad, and went downstairs and had hysterics. I felt that our house was ruined, being associated with a murder, and the police coming, and, of course, suspecting somebody in the house, which was absurd, for people in respectable houses like ours don't go about stabbing foreigners in the back and stealing photographs.

But they didn't suspect anybody in the house very long, but made up their minds, after a careful examination of the premises, that in some ex-

traordinary way someone had got in from outside, and done it and gone and left no trace. I told them about Mr. De Lorme being so particular about the shutters and the windows when he came, and then one of the detectives, with a foreign name, said, ‘Ah, that is what I suspected—he was afraid of just what has happened, but how the deuce was it done?’

Then he told us in strict confidence that they had very soon discovered who Mr. Paul De Lorme really was, and had examined his papers and things, and that he really was a secret agent of the Russian Government, or, as we called them over here, a police spy ; and that he was communicating with the police in Russia with regard to some Nihilists, who were quite a little colony in London, and there was no doubt that he was stabbed by one of the Nihilists who had found him out and traced him home. But the mysterious part of the affair was how did the assassin get in, and why did he take away that young woman’s photograph ?

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our house, the scene of a tragedy, and in the papers, and everybody gaping at it!—and that was that the news from the hospital was favourable. Though the wound was a very bad one the doctors had great hope of saving Mr. De Lorme, and that was something; for if they did we shouldn't have had a murder in the house, and there would be no inquest.

The foreign detective said he knew quite enough now to get on the track, and knowing who Mr. De Lorme was—that, of course, was not his real name—he should find out very soon who the young woman was, and that would give a clue to the assassin; and he went away, the other detective saying he would come back at night, and then make experiments to try and see how the murderer actually got in.

He went away and returned about eleven o'clock, and went into the back-yard and tried to climb up to the bedroom window by throwing a rope up with a hook at the end which caught the sill and then dragged himself up, but directly he got up he found it impossible to open the window without

cutting the glass out. It was just as he had found it—shut and fastened—in the morning, so of course that was not the way the man got in.

Then he asked us for all the latchkeys from everybody, which we got; and he said were they all there? and I said yes, and then I remembered there was the spare one which cook had had the previous night, so I asked her what she had done with it, and she said she had left it in the pocket of her best dress, which was upstairs. She went and got it, and brought it down and gave it to the detective, and he put it with the others, and then said, ‘Hulloa, this key’s different! you never got in with that key last night.’

I looked at the key cook had given him, and it was *not* our latchkey, but a key of quite another sort. Then cook began to cry, and the detective frightened her, and said, ‘Now you must tell us everything. How do you come by this key—you took the right key away, because Mrs. Jarvis says you had her spare one, and you bring this back. How did you let yourself in?’



barman said that was all he knew of the man, who spoke English well, but was a foreigner. The detective said it was what they called a put-up job and had been well planned, and they meant getting in somehow sooner or later, and would have killed Mr. De Lorme in his bed if he had been there, but probably came in noiselessly and opened the door of the sitting-room and stabbed him before he could move.

‘And took the photograph away?’ I said.

‘Yes,’ the detective said; ‘that’s the odd part—it’s what we call a political crime, I expect, and the man is a foreign conspirator, a Nihilist possibly, but the photograph is an odd feature of the case.’

It all happened years ago, but I remember everything that followed that dreadful night as if it were yesterday. Every effort to find the foreigner who had made friends with our cook’s young man failed, and the detectives told us it was supposed that, believing he had accomplished his mission, which was to kill Mr. De Lorme, he had left England at

once. Mr. De Lorme got well after some time in the hospital, but would say nothing, only that he had been stabbed—that he saw no one, and knew nothing about it. When he left the hospital he didn't come to our place, and we never saw him again. The solicitor who had given us the reference called with an order signed by Mr. De Lorme, and everything was given up to him to take away. We were glad it ended as it did, and in time the thing was forgotten, and we didn't want Mr. De Lorme back; for I am sure I should never have slept a wink while he was in the house, expecting him to be murdered every evening, because I had read about these dreadful foreigners, who are never satisfied until they have killed the man they want to, and will follow him all over the world to do it.

The mystery of the photograph was cleared up by the foreign detective, who it seems managed to get some information through someone he knew who was mixed up with the Nihilists. It seems that Mr. De Lorme, when in St. Petersburg, fell in love with a very beautiful young woman, and was

almost mad about her, but she was cold to him, knowing what he was and hating the idea, and she herself being in love with a young fellow, an artist, to whom she used to sit as a model for her beautiful face. De Lorme was madly jealous, and when he learned that the girl was going to marry the artist, the day before the marriage he denounced the girl as being concerned in a Nihilist plot, and went to her lodgings and found papers which made her appear guilty, but which it was always believed he had had put there by some of his people. The poor girl was sent to Siberia for life, and De Lorme said at any rate she was safe there from her lover, and he would let him stay free and think of the woman in misery. It would be greater torture than having him arrested and sent away or executed. It was a villainous thing to do, and I remembered those eyes that had terrified me and I understood all. But he still loved the woman, odd as it may seem, and kept her portrait in his room. The detective—the foreign one—said he had no doubt it was the lover, the artist, who came to England

to have vengeance on the man who had injured them, and he it was who stabbed De Lorme and took away the photograph. And we never heard any more of the case, though we often wondered if De Lorme was ever hunted down again.

It was a wild romance, as Jarvis said, to end in a quiet, respectable house in London, but it did, and it was a long time before we forgot it, and for a year after people would stop and look up at the dining-room, which was let to a very respectable old maiden lady who never read the papers, thank goodness, and knew nothing of what had happened in the very chair in which she used to sit and read religious books and nurse our cat Tommy.

But it was the last foreigner we ever had in our house, and if one had come with untold gold and poured it into my lap after that awful affair I wouldn't have so much as let him hang his hat up in the hall or put his umbrella in the stand. You don't want detectives in the house more than once in your lifetime, trying to find out who murdered your ground-floor.

## X.

### *ANNIE.*

SHE was my sister Annie's child. Poor Annie! We all hoped after her first dreadful marriage she would be more fortunate in her second; and when she became acquainted with a well-established, respectable tradesman she had been in the habit of meeting at church, he being of a serious turn of mind, and a blue ribbon into the bargain, and at last became engaged, we all hoped she would be very happy; for if you are not happy with a middle-aged man with a good business, who is constant at church and a strict teetotaler, who can you expect to be happy with?

Mr. Samuel Partington was the man I should

have said would have been the husband for any woman who had had trouble with her first; but how little one knows of the ways of men! He was a tyrant and wanted a slave, not a wife, as I told him one day when I gave him a piece of my mind; and Annie, after they had been married a year, found to her cost that a man may not drink anything but coffee and tea and lemonade, and yet be quite as cruel to a woman as if he spent his earnings at the public-house.

I don't say Sam Partington meant to be cruel—I will do him that justice—but he was such a hard man. He could do without any pleasure or gaiety himself, and he thought everybody else could. He looked on wine and spirits as abominations, and so he couldn't understand that a delicate young woman occasionally needs a little stimulant to keep her up, which even doctors recognise; and as to me, I know unless I had had my glass of beer with my lunch, and a glass of wine with my dinner, I should have broken down with the work, and the worry, and the stairs, and Jarvis, many a long year ago,

instead of being the healthy, well-preserved old woman that I am now.

Sam Partington I always fancied was hard through his love of money, for he was mean, and, as I told him once, worshipped money, which was wicked. He said he had started a poor orphan boy from the North with nothing, and worked his way up by industry and thrift, and he knew the value of money because it had been taught him young. I said the value of money is to spend it sensibly, and to use it to make yourself and those around you comfortable, not to put it away in a bank, never to be seen again till you are dead, and then perhaps go to somebody who doesn't want it or will fling it away, but he said women didn't understand such matters. There never was such a man to belittle women. To hear him you would think they were a pack of household drudges, with no duties or aims in life beyond having babies and keeping the household expenses down.

He got punished for his meanness, but unfortunately poor Annie got punished too, for after they

had been married some years he invested all his money in a loan to some place abroad—I forget which now—but it was supposed to be as good as gold, and paid a big interest. It was the big interest that tempted Sam Partington, but he never got it; for two years afterwards the State was bankrupt, and everybody knew that it had swindled a lot of English people out of their savings—Samuel Partington among them.

The loss of his money preyed on his mind, and he neglected the business that he had, and presently everything was sold, although all the time he was still a sober man, but he used to sit and brood and be morose. And after his death, which took place not long afterwards, the doctor said there was no doubt the loss of his money affected his mind and really broke his heart.

And there was poor Annie a widow for the second time, and with just enough money left from the wreck to keep her and her little girl by her second husband from absolute want. She didn't live long herself; the second blow and being a burden to



mother again broke her spirit, and she died, poor thing! and with her dying breath gave her little Annie to me, and I promised the child should be as my own, I being a childless woman; and those were the last words my darling, sorely-tried sister heard, for she soon became insensible and passed away. But there was a smile again upon her face after death, and it seemed to me she was happy because she knew that I would be a mother to her little one.

Annie came to our home, and Jarvis and I loved her like our own child. She went to school in the neighbourhood and learnt the piano and French, and grew up in time into a beautiful and bright young woman—the light of our home and the joy of our old hearts. It was never dull where Annie was, and Jarvis in his worst moods always had a smile for her. And a great help she proved to be to me in time, and everybody in the house liked her, for she was quite the lady, and had a lovely complexion, and was tall, with masses of beautiful brown hair, though where she got her beauty from

we could not guess, her father being what might be called an ugly man, and my dear sister, though sweet and amiable, certainly not what one would call pretty—in fact, people used always to compare us and call me the pretty miss, and Annie the plain miss, which was very rude. But dear Annie would laugh, never having had an atom of jealousy in her composition and being devoted to me with her whole heart.

She was just the light and sunshine of our home, was my niece Annie, and when the trouble came—ah, I don't like to think of it even now, though I always hope and believe that some day she will come back, and I shall take her in my old arms again, and forgive her all.

It was an evil day for us that *he* came to live in our house, but I didn't think it when I first saw him. 'Mr. Horace Garston is a gentleman,' Jarvis always said, and I agreed with him. He was more than that: he was a most charming man, not what would be called good-looking, but a man who made one take to him and sympathize with him. And

he had such a sad, dreamy look in his eyes that you felt he was a man who ought to have been happy and wasn't.

He was about thirty-five, I should say, and we always thought he was a widower until we found out the truth—and we found it out too late.

Our Annie played the piano beautifully, and I'm particularly fond of music, and Mr. Garston sang, having a most lovely tenor voice, so sometimes of an evening he would ask if Annie might come and play his accompaniments, and he would ask me to come up with her and bring my knitting. And many a time the tears have come into my eyes, hearing him sing some sad sweet song in a way that made it all real, and I have seen Annie's eyes quite wet, too, as she played.

I ought to have seen the danger, but such an idea never entered my head. When I was laid up for a little while Annie still played, and Mr. Garston sang of an evening. And I thought no harm of it even when she came to me and told me that she was so sorry for him, and he had had a most

unhappy life, and was lonely and down-hearted, having lost everyone he cared for.

She didn't tell me that she knew he was married; but he had told her so, as I found out afterwards, and his wife, who was a beautiful young woman, had wrecked his life, having taken to secret drinking, which it seems ran in the family, and she had nearly ruined him through it, and he had given up everything and sold off his home and come to live in our house, not caring for chambers, and his wife was away with a doctor in the country, who looked after such cases, and had, it seems, several times tried to kill herself, so that she was never safe to be left a moment.

It was very, very sad, I know, and Mr. Garston was to be pitied, but it was wicked of him to wreck another young life in order to try and mend his own.

The first that I noticed of anything wrong was Annie seemed changed. We never heard her laugh, and she went about the house in a dull, listless way, only brightening up of an evening

when Mr. Garston came home and she could go up and play for him. I was blind even then, and thinking that it was only that she wasn't very well, and that the music cheered her, I encouraged her to go up, and would often go up myself at Mr. Garston's invitation, and sit in the room, too. It was his asking me to do that which threw me off my guard. I saw she was always better, and I encouraged it. Ah, if I had only known!

He was asking her to go away with him. Every evening when I was engaged or sitting upstairs with Jarvis, who at that time was taken with an illness which was to be a long one, but his last, poor dear! she was in his room with him, and he was pleading to her, passionately, to go away with him and make his life happy, to bring back the joy and the peace of life to his lonely heart, and she had given him her whole soul and loved him better than anything in the world beside.

Oh, it was wicked—wicked! He ought to have gone away when he found out the truth. He knew

that he could not make her his wife, and he ought never to have let her fall in love with him.

He did go away at last. Poor Annie, almost broken-hearted, had told him that it could never be; that it would bring shame and sorrow to me, and she owed me everything. She told me all when she wrote to me afterwards, and it was she who asked him to go.

He told us he was going abroad, and left, and for a day or two Annie seemed a little better; but it was an effort. She was acting a part, poor child; and her heart was breaking. She heard from him, I'm sure. The letters used to come to the house; but I never saw them. She was always up early, and took them from the postman, I expect. But she began to grow pale and lost her appetite, and I made her see a doctor. He said it was nothing, and gave her strengthening medicine and said she was to be out in the air all she could, and so every afternoon I made her go out. She met him then—met him every day, and the spell upon her was stronger than ever; and she must have told

him then that she would go away with him and share his life.

One morning—it is a morning the memory of which will never fade from my old heart until it ceases to beat—I came down rather late and missed Annie. I thought she must be unwell and staying late in bed, and so I went up to her room, and knocked and said, ‘Annie! Annie!’

There was no answer, and a terrible thought flashed across me. The doctor had said that her heart was weak—she had died in her sleep! I pushed the door open, and ran in. The room was empty. No dresses were hanging on the pegs; there was nothing to be seen—only a letter in her handwriting on her dressing-table, addressed ‘Auntie.’

How I opened the letter I shall never know. I was like a woman in a dream. For a moment I thought it wasn’t real, but that I was reading a chapter out of a book.

But gradually I realized it. She had gone—gone away with a married man to live with him

as his wife. My pure, good Annie, my dead sister's child, had done that !

The letter told me the truth—it concealed nothing ; the story of her lover's married life, her love, and how she had fought against it, how at last she had given up everything for him, and it begged me to forget her and some day to forgive her.

The letter dropped from my hand—I fell on my knees by the little bed where she had slept so many years, and I buried my head in my hands and wept the bitterest tears I have ever shed in my life. Then I lifted up my face and clasped my hands and prayed to God to forgive her and put the blame on me. It was all my fault!—all my fault! I should have seen what was happening and have prevented it. I had given my dying sister my word to guard her darling all my life and I had let her go to sin and shame.

I never told my husband the truth—at least only half the truth. At first I told him that Annie had gone to the country to my cousin in a hurry, she



being ill, and had not woke him up to say good-bye. Then I told him she had gone away with Mr. Garston, and that she had got married abroad. He never knew that Garston was a married man. He thought she had treated me badly, and he said so, and he thought Garston had behaved very unhandsomely; but after all they were married, so there was no more to be said; and then he began to talk about himself and his sufferings, for he was terribly selfish, as all invalids are, especially when they are near the end.

I thought it would have killed me at first, but I was always a brave woman in great things if I was a weak one in little things; and I knew that for me to show my real feelings would only be to let everybody know the truth; and for the girl's sake I made up my mind that no one should ever know.

The servants thought it strange, especially as none of them had seen Annie go. She must have got up before they were about and gone off, and, as I afterwards learnt, she and Mr. Garston went straight away abroad that very morning by the

earliest train. I pretended to the servants that I knew that she was going early, and made the best of it that I could; but they knew that something was the matter, especially when the time went on and Annie never returned, and then I explained that we had had a few words, and that she had resented them and gone to live with a cousin of ours in the country. And that is what I used to tell the people in the house as well, for they all missed Annie at once and could not understand her going away; but, thank God, no one ever guessed what a terrible thing had really happened.

I think I should have sunk to the earth for very shame had they known it, for I was always a proud woman concerning my own people.

The house was never the same after she went. I missed her everywhere, and something seemed suddenly to have gone out of my life. Sometimes for a moment I would forget, and hear a footstep on the stairs, and say, 'That's Annie.' And then I remembered, and my sorrow stabbed me to the heart like a knife.

She wrote to me and he wrote to me. The letters were all very well as far as they went. He was kind to her, and while they were abroad she bore his name and passed as his wife. But she knew that as she was I could never think of her as I used to do—never lay my hand on her golden hair and bless her, and thank God for her love and tenderness.

Her letters were very gentle and very sweet, and yet very sad. She felt for me, I knew—she tried so hard to atone by words—she pleaded so hard that I would think of how she had grown to love this man, and how lonely and how hopeless his life was, and that she could not let him go from her for ever; but my old-fashioned ideas of right and wrong were never changed by anything she wrote. I know to-day they make excuses for many things that old-fashioned folks thought wrong and sinful, and young women nowadays talk in a way that their own grown-up mothers would have blushed to do; but I think our old-fashioned ideas were far more likely to make people happy and healthy in

mind and body than the new-fangled, hysterical notions which I hear to-day, and some of which make me shudder and wonder what the world is coming to.

I wrote back as kindly and as gently as I could, but I daren't be too kind, though I would have given anything to be. I couldn't have it on my soul that I recognised or excused the evil that she had done. There was one thing I dreaded—one terrible thing that will come home to every woman's heart—that their sin should cast the shadow of a life-long shame upon an innocent child. I think the fear of that hardened my heart against *him* more than anything else. I could never harden it against her—against my Annie.

And now it is a year ago since Jarvis died, and two years since Annie left us, and I am alone in the old home, where so many happy years of my life were spent. My girls are good and kind, and as faithful servants as anyone could wish to have. And the people in my house are all old friends, and some of them have been with me for years;

but my great sorrow is an abiding one, and day by day in my loneliness it comes home to me more and more.

I am well off in this world's goods, for I have never been an extravagant woman, and Jarvis lived his life at home and put our savings by year by year, and I have dividends to draw at the bank ; and like the brave, good blacksmith the bass gentleman generally sings about at an evening party or concert, I owe no man anything.

But, like him, I never go to church but I hear a voice that used to be music in my ears, and that has gone and left a great silence in my life for ever.

No, not for ever ! I had finished my memoirs and put the writing aside in my desk, and felt that I had done well in following poor Captain Roberts's advice, for it had made many a long evening pass more cheerfully and more quickly, when I had two great surprises.

One was a letter from Captain Roberts himself—

a long letter, and in it a bank draft for the money, and interest added for all the years it had been owing. It was a wonderful letter, and would have made a book of adventures, for terrible things had gone on happening to him in all parts of the world; and, as I said to myself, he was a second baron with the German name I used to read about as a child, who was always having adventures that never happened to anyone else before or since. He had made a fortune in some queer place where he had property that had to have the military to guard it day and night, and lost it all in half an hour through a revolution breaking out and everything being seized by a man with an awful name who shot everybody before breakfast, and was afterwards shot himself while standing on a balcony and shouting 'Three cheers for liberty.' He had bought an island thousands of miles from anywhere, cheap (I mean Captain Roberts had), and farmed it, and just as it was beginning to show a profit it had disappeared all of a sudden under the sea, leaving the poor Captain to escape with

only a sleeping suit on, in an indiarubber bath which he had bought cheap of an English missionary who visited the island and was short of money. He had been picked up by a ship and taken to a whaling-station, where he had gone partners with a native, and being a clever business man had established quite a trade, and made enough money to get on board a ship and make his way to the Cape, where he had gone diamond digging, and there lost all his money again through being drugged and robbed in Johannesburg; and he had then gone to Australia and been lucky with land, and was just going to build a new street when his bank broke on the very morning he was going to draw all his money out to pay for the ground and give a big deposit to the building contractors!

But he had dropped on his feet again, had the Captain, through a man he had saved from being murdered at the diamond diggings dying without knowing who his relatives were, not having heard of them from where they lived in Ireland for years,

and leaving him all his money, which was many thousands of pounds. And now he was settled down and married to a widow with five children, and he sent me my money at once before anything happened to him, and he wished me a 'Merry Christmas and a happy New Year,' though why he did it, as I got the letter in July, I'm sure I don't know. But I always had a kindly remembrance of Captain Roberts, and I felt very glad to think that he was doing well in his old age at last, though perhaps at his time of life he could have done without the five children.

And Annie has come back, come back not to live with me, but to ask me to live with her and her *husband*. Yes, she is married now, married and really happy at last, and for all of us two years of her life—the two years abroad—are dead for ever.

Mr. Garston's wife died suddenly in the private asylum where she had been placed, and her death was a merciful release not only to him, but herself.



And a month afterwards my Annie was married in London, very quietly, and the sacrifice she made for love, and for the sake of a man's unhappy life, will, I hope, be forgiven her, as the sin of a weak woman's loving, tender heart. I have forgiven her long ago, and I will not think of it again. She is the *wife* of the man she loves, and who loves her, and I have seen them in their home happy, and I am content. They want me to sell off my old home and the goodwill of my business, and come and end my days with them ; but I cling to the old place, and I am too old to begin a new life. I shall stay where I am to the end, I hope, but I shall see my dear child and her husband very often. I shall always be a welcome visitor there, I know, and sometimes she will come and have a happy day with me, and let her merry laugh—a little quieter now—ring through the old rooms and bring back the long ago, when there was no shadow on my life, and my poor Jarvis slept in the big easy chair by the fire, and we chatted together quietly for fear of waking him, because he generally woke

up peevish, and was irritable for half an hour or so, and told us how ill he was, and groaned, poor dear, as much from habit as anything else, till Annie went to him and coaxed him into a good temper, and made him forget his troubles till his bedtime came.

And so I close these Memoirs with a lighter heart than I commenced them, and I know that the evening of my days will be peace, though of course now and then I must expect trouble, for even the best of lodgers will cause you anxiety at times.

There is an old maid on the second floor who is really a dear, sweet old lady, but she will insist upon going all over the house herself when everybody is in bed to see if all the gas is turned off, having once been in a house where it was left on, and the cook went with a lighted candle to look for the escape, and there was an explosion, and in her fright the poor old lady ran out in the street with her wig in her hand, and she combing it out in her bedroom, as she was going out to an evening party

at her nephew's ; and it so upset her that she never went to bed in any house afterwards without seeing herself that all the gas was turned off.

And I have a married couple in the dining-rooms who, though nice people generally, are very worrying over their meals, both being bad digesters, and particular about what they have, and always making me suggest things that won't hurt them ; and as they can't eat beef or pork, or veal or pastry, or anything rich, I have to rack my brains to think of something different every day, so that they don't always have the same thing ; and the gentleman is always leaving his diamond ring on the washstand, or letting his studs slip behind the chest of drawers, or putting a five-pound note in the oddest possible places. And about twice a week the girls and myself are engaged for about two hours turning the rooms inside out to look for something valuable, which he declares he has lost, and which is generally found in some out-of-the-way place where he has put it himself.

I have a little worry with the girls, too, occa-

sionally, for two of them are young and have sweethearts; and it makes me say 'Bother the men!' sometimes, for they spoil girls for their work terribly at times, making them jealous, and that sort of thing. And I am inclined to think that the best servant to have is a nice respectable woman with a husband in a lunatic asylum, or somewhere where she knows he is safe.

But these are only little troubles after all, and I have no great ones now, and I can fold my hands on my lap after dinner and fall asleep in my chair, and wake up at peace with myself and the world; and so I am happy, and contented, and grateful, knowing that there are many hundreds of landladies in this great London who have worked quite as hard as I have, been perhaps more deserving, and yet who will read my Memoirs and sigh, and wish that they had been only half as fortunate. For all my blessings I am deeply grateful, and I put my pen down, my task completed, with a grateful heart, and a hope that those who may read what I have written will believe that I have done my best

and written truthfully my own experiences of a long, and, I think I may say, useful and busy life. And so I sign myself the reader's obedient, humble servant,

SUSAN JARVIS.

THE END.

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[SEE OVER.

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